

I Guess We Don't Care Because We're Not the Victims

The Sexual Education of Black Men and their
Perceptions of Sexual Violence in Georgia, USA

Rachel Lewis

6142478

Medical Anthropology and Sociology

Thesis Supervisor: Margriet van Heesch

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
Abstract.....	4
Chapter 1-Introduction: Why Do We Need to Know Rape?	5
1.1- To Go Where No One Wants to Go.....	6
1.2-Methodology: My Tools in the Toolbox.....	9
1.3-Background: Dealing with the Past to Understand the Present	11
1.4-Theory: Common Sense Expressed Through Intellectual Rhetoric.....	14
1.5-Thesis Structure: Down the Rabbit Hole	16
Chapter 2-Background and Theory: Can Sex, Race, and Violence be Rationalized?	18
Chapter 2.1-Background Discussion: Georgia on My Mind.....	19
Chapter 2.2-African American Culture: More than MTV and Maury	20
Chapter 2.3-Feminism: Not Just for the Ladies	23
Chapter 3-Sexual Education: Trade of Information.....	26
3.1-Sex Ed in the US: Not Just in the Classroom.....	26
3.2-Sex in the Classroom	28
3.3-Sexual Education and Sexual Violence: Sex is About Love, Right?.....	31
3.4-Conclusion: Sex Ed is the Ultimate Confusion	33
Chapter 4-Influences: Sources of Information on Sex, Sexual Pleasure, and Violence	34
4.1-Medicine: A Condom a Day Keeps the Doctor Away.....	34
4.2-Family: It Begins at Home	36
4.3-Music: Video Vixens and Love Songs.....	38
4.4-Porn, Internet Access and Movies: Totally Visual	40
4.5-Conclusion: So Many Sources, So Little Time.....	41
Chapter 5-Practice: Do Not Talk About It, Walk About It.....	43
5.1-Sex and Rough Sex: Their Little Bag of Tricks?	43
5.2-Sexual Violence: Can't Try to be Superman	45
5.3-Prevention and Action: What Can Be Done?	46
5.4-Conclusion: Proactive Nonchalance	48

Chapter 6-Conclusion: Down the Rabbit Hole and Back Again 49
Bibliography 53

Abstract

Studies concerning sexual education and sexual violence have typically focused on women as victims and therefore have placed both subjects in terms of prevention. However, there has been a lack in contemporary literature that place men heterosexual within the overall discussion. Despite their assumed place of power in social and cultural realms throughout the world, men have been internally displaced from sexual health and sexual violence dialogues. This thesis intends to find where a small group of African American men fit in the conversation.

Chapter 1-Introduction: Why Do We Need to Know Rape?

“I am more likely to be raped due to my age and the fact that I attend college, and worst of all... the perpetrator is most likely someone I know. How is it that I’m trained to keep strangers at bay and watch them when I should really be watching my friends, family, acquaintances? They say ‘Watch your back’? I say ‘Watch your front’.”

-Personal Reflection

As a woman, I have had to learn about sexual violence. About how not to become a victim by watching my drinks, traveling to clubs in groups, and being aware of my surroundings. Throughout my life, the threat of sexual assault has always been something that I have kept in the back of my mind. During the last few years, I have begun to wonder about the other side of the issue. I know of women who have been victims of sexual violence and I have read literature concerning the topic. Yet all of the literature tended to lack a specific subject; the role of men in the construction and perpetuation of sexual violence. When I began to ponder questions surrounding this particular issue, I decided to ask my friends about how they felt about sexual violence. My male friends in particular seemed very distant from the subject while the females seemed to have a grasp of the concept. I asked one male friend to tell me where men fit into the picture of sexual violence. He went on the state in a rather flustered manner that, “you’re not supposed to do that! That’s all I know! [he laughs] You don’t do things to people against their will” (Ty 2010). Others stated that “there are some crazy men out here that would just go rape girls. That’s just the way it is” (John 2010). As a server at a restaurant, I also began asking male patrons about their thoughts on sexual violence as a subject, many of the responses included “some men are born like that” or “education has nothing to do with it”. Even in those instances, it appeared that there was some kind of defeat in the voices of these men. People who committed sexual offenses were not mentally stable, there is nothing to be done about them except place them in jail and have them serve their time for the offence. Is it possible? Is it that easy? Is it just a concept of “some people are just born that way”? In workshops and programs that centered on sexual violence and sexual assault, I had felt that the focus was so much more on me and my

female colleagues than our male counterparts. So where were the men in this entire discussion? How did they feel about sexual violence? Was it in the back of their minds like it was in the back of mine? This study intends to try and answer these questions. To try and figure out how a group of men use their knowledge about sex to understand and conceptualize sexual violence. I am rejecting the notion that some people are born “that way”. It is the intent of this study to find how men think and feel about the subject of sexual violence and sexual education. It is time to make gender studies and sexuality studies something that is no longer just for the ladies. I endeavor to continue the role of few and bring men back into the fold.

1.1- To Go Where No One Wants to Go

According to the National Institute of Justice currently one out of six women in the United States has reported attempted or complete rape within their lifetime (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Along with these numbers, male victims are estimated to be one out of thirty-three in the United States. Regardless of sex, statistically men tend to be the main perpetrators of sexual violence in American society. As of 2007, the number of sexual assaults in the United States topped at 248,300 or one sexual assault every two minutes (National Crime Victimization Survey 2007). In fact sheets from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, being a male is considered a factor for a being a perpetrator of sexual violence (CDC 2008). Research on sexual violence has produced literature pertaining to the preventative measures that can be taken by potential victims (often women), cultural understanding of sexual offenders, as well as the cultural understanding of sexual violence as a whole. While the focus has mainly been placed on women, there has been a lack of attention placed on the potential sexual offenders, the men.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in a national survey of 9,684 adults while 10.6 percent of women have reported experiencing forced sex at some time in their lives, only 2.1 percent of men can say the same (CDC 2008). In police reports within the United States, about 60 percent sexual violence cases go unreported due to notions of shame, powerlessness, etc. not only in women but also in men as well. As of 2007, over 248,300 cases of sexual assault were reported in the United States according to the US Department of Justice (National Crime Victimization Survey 2007). Of these cases, majority of the perpetrators were men. According to the Department of Justice, “the vast majority (91.9 percent) of women who were physically assaulted since age 18 were assaulted by a male” (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000).

Interestingly enough, most of literature concerning male roles in sexual violence only reinforces this fact but do not necessarily address why men are continuously the culprits. Also, with the prevalence of sexual violence, there have been studies conducted on how sexual violence has increased medical costs within the United States. Therefore, the first problem that needs to be identified is the call for researching the impact of men on sexual violence as a matter of public health within an industrialized country.

After the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, studies of men in regards to sexual experiences and education has been placed within a marginalized space. Matthew Gutmann's *Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity* states this issue, "although in the past two decades the study of gender comprises the most important new body of theoretical and empirical work in the discipline of anthropology overall, gender studies are still often equated with women's studies" (Gutmann 1997: 385). In regards to sexuality studies as well as anthropological research, women and children have become the main concern of academics and researchers. Although, there has been an emergence of masculinity studies within sociology and other social sciences, these works are few and scant in comparison with the number studies produced about women. Most of the studies conducted today within the United States concerning reproductive health, sexuality, and sexual violence focus on the female perspective. The second problem is to understand why men have been left out of the sexual violence dialogue in both the practical and academic world.

Therefore for this thesis, I will investigate the following questions: *how does the informal and formal sexual education of African American men in Georgia relate to sexual violence according to them? In other words, are the men truly affected by objects such as media, family, friends, and other outside sources when it comes to thinking about sex and sexual violence? Particularly, how do their knowledges influence their perceptions of sexual violence in concept as well as in practice. Also, what are the contradictions between what is being said and what is being done.* Following these four questions, my sub questions are:

- How was sexual violence theorized and studied before and how did that relate to the African American experience?
- How does sexual education influence notions of sexuality and sexual violence?
- What sources of information are considered important by the men in the discussion of sexuality and sexual violence?

- How does information come into practice?

Research works towards identifying factors that women can use in a practical matter to tackle these areas within the society. In other studies, most of the forums used to analyze men include the media and in some cases, are used exclusively to attempt to understand male behavior in the US (Hirdman 2007, Kistler and Lee 2010). Past research has also focused on their place within society whether it is through the concept of race, socio-economic status, or if they are already sexual offenders (Collins 2002, Orchowsky and Weiss 2000, Voller, Long and Aosved 2008). Throughout the past research, few have placed emphasis have placed on the actual sexual experiences of men or how they negotiate these specific practices with different partners. However, my research will focus exactly on the sexual experiences of the men and place the emphasis on how they describe different sexual situations with their past partners. By ignoring men as actors in this aspect allows for this kind of behavior remain unquestioned. It reinforces a “boys will be boys” attitude that places men outside of responsibility. I want to comprehend how their unique understanding of these situations plays into larger notions of gender-relations, power, violence, and sexuality. By conducting this research, I hope to contribute to larger discussions about men, male sexuality, and sexual violence. My research is situated in Atlanta, Georgia and focuses on how men learn about sex as well as how that information pertains to sexual violence.

I specifically want to focus on the sexual information, the perceptions of sex, and the personal experiences of the men in regards to sex and sexual violence. During this process, I have been asked why it is even necessary to conduct research on such a topic. I find that this is a necessary subject and the people within the study are even more important. Why should we continue to study sexual violence strictly from a female perspective? This is parallel to trying to solve an equation with a missing variable. Statistically, men are mainly the perpetrators of sexual violence within the United States. Therefore, it would stand to reason that men as a group should become a subject of study. By looking at sexual violence as a behavior as well as a cultural phenomenon, we can begin to observe how sex is traditionally viewed. Furthermore, by conducting studies such as this, I feel that perhaps the dialogue will expand. Let us place men back into the discussion about sex, sexual health, and sexual violence. Let us make the equation complete.

1.2-Methodology: My Tools in the Toolbox

In my research, I am studying the effects of knowledge on the sexual practices of men and how it plays a role in understanding and interpreting sexual violence. I used in-depth interviews to gain a better understanding between what is said and how things are practiced. It became my intention to analyze how they understand sex, sexuality, and sexual violence through examination of their past and/or sexual practices. In other words, I want to hear their voices, their thoughts on sexual violence and sexual education. The interviews have allowed them to express these thoughts and perceptions.

For this study, I interviewed about ten African American heterosexual men between the ages of 20 and 30 with a varying range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. By including different educational backgrounds, the data has provided interesting variations based on the amount of formal sexual education (i.e. high school, college, etc.) and how it is juxtaposed with the participants' informal sexual education (family, friends, etc). In the United States, most forms of formal sexual education are taught during the high school years, mainly between the ages of 14-18 years of age. With that being said, post-secondary education provides more programs concerning sexual violence and appropriate sexual practices.

The location of my study is in the state of Georgia which is situated in the Southeastern portion of the United States. Due to the locations of my informants, the research was conducted in three cities: Atlanta, Marietta, and Kennesaw. Most of the interviews have been conducted at either the home of the informant or at a public location such as a coffee shop or bar. Depending on the personal rapport and comfort level I had with the informants, the locations would vary in order to address safety issues. Most of the participants have been men with whom I already have established a rapport with as well as some of their acquaintances. I selected a balanced number of both acquaintances and strangers in order to establish more of a variation amongst the group. For this study, I first contacted the men I have an established relationship with and through them, I was able to contact other men. In other words, I gathered contacts/participants through the effect known as "snowballing" in which I used contacts to lead me to other participants.

This is a qualitative study that is done strictly through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that ranged from about one and one half to two hours in length. The interviews were recorded by tape recorder with the consent of the participants. The interviews were conducted on

an individual basis for the most part with a possibility of having an extra participant present as well. All interviews were conducted either at coffee shops, bars, or the home of the participant. Location became contingent on ability of travel and safety as well as the availability of the participants. Most of the men worked at different places of employment; therefore most interviews were done either during the evening during the week or some time on the weekends. Also, by using one-on-one interviews, I was able to focus and analyze the language used by the men in different scenarios. Since the subject matter is considered sensitive in nature, the one-on-one interviews were meant to give the participant a sense of privacy and confidentiality. Also, it provided a form of anonymity among the participants. All participants were given pseudonyms that were used during the transcription part of the write-up process. I also observed men in places that I deemed “sexual spaces” such as clubs, bars, and even watching some of the men interact with their current partners/ significant others. This is meant to observe how men use their multiple sources of sexual knowledge in actual different situations. As the sample size is small, it is imperative that I reiterate that the information is not meant to be generalized. This is a small case study in which the individual voice is meant to analyze larger structures and moreover, determine if social factors truly do encourage individual behavior. In this case, the individual voices are meant to be heard.

A Woman in a Men’s Club

As I conducted this study, I interviewed the men about their past and present sexual experiences or to be put more precisely, their experiences with the concept known as sex. I had initially questioned how I was to go about engaging these men in discussions about their sex lives. In particular, I felt that because I am a woman and a feminist, there would be some form of resistance in terms of information. Also, even though rapport is considered one of the most vital tools in anthropological research, I knew that some information might have been left out because of my position in the lives of these men. There is still a form of being an outsider because of my sex, gender, and political thoughts concerning this topic. Yet, being an outsider also provided me the opportunity to look inside this group. As my feminist scholars before me, I have adopted more of a “Standpoint Theory” position. In this, I mean that my position to which I view the information in this study is partial in nature to other standpoints and also that my point of view as a woman, as a feminist, as an African American does have some influence. I can never truly be

objective because I can never truly be an outsider. Although they are not completely isolated, they do have a sort of border or boundary surrounding them. I understand that I would never be able to fully understand what it means to be an African American man in America or how it feels to go through a sexual awakening that appears to be accepted fully by society. Yet, I endeavor to try and paint a clearer picture for myself about sexual education and sexual violence from their perspective.

One of the main ethical considerations that have been taken into account while conducting this research concerns privacy and confidentiality. Because of the possibly explicit nature of the information, I wanted to ensure that the privacy of the informant is protected. In order to address this issue, all names have been changed. Furthermore, due to the potential for information concerning possible illegal sexual acts, I felt that providing confidentiality and anonymity was the most ethical thing to do. Another aspect of privacy that I wanted to protect is any names used by the informant, such as the name of former lover, and therefore I have altered those names as well to protect the identity of the partner(s).

I understand that hearing some of the information might trigger some form of anger, frustration, or possible resentment towards the informant. Some of their views on sex, the treatment of women, and how to address sexual violence in the United States produced frustration and aggravation in conducting this study. In order to address this, I have evaluated the information merely as data and attempted to not become involved in the personal sex lives of my informants. I reminded myself that through Anthropology, I can analyze what these men may truly mean. In the end, I remember that their thoughts are to be treated with respect, not only because of their sensitive nature but also because of their truth.

1.3-Background: Dealing with the Past to Understand the Present

This study is male-centered in essence while at the same time focusing on larger theories of power, sexuality, discipline, gender, and violence. The analysis will also build on Donna Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges" in which knowledge is deconstructed, constructed, and reconstructed from multiple sources of information. In terms of gender and identity, I will use Judith Butler's notion of gender performance and identity to further comprehend how sex and sexual violence is used as a way of producing a specific sexualized or desexualized identity for the men.

Sexual Violence: Where the Line is Drawn

First, we must establish a working definition of what constitutes as sexual violence. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), sexual violence “refers to sexual activity where consent is not obtained or freely given” (Understanding Sexual Violence: Fact Sheet 2007). This is a rather broad definition that is intended to include acts such as sexual harassment, touching without consent, and rape. Legal definitions of what constitutes as sexual violence varies from state to state and thus, for this study I will focus on Georgia State law. Also, I will place emphasis on local/social knowledge of what is known as sexual violence. In written law, one can begin to see how men are categorized as the perpetrator of sexual violence such as in Georgia State law which states under Title 16, Chapter 6 that rape consists:

A person commits the offense of rape when *he* has carnal knowledge of: (1) A *female* forcibly and against *her* will; or (2) A female who is less than ten years of age. Carnal knowledge in rape occurs when there is any penetration of the *female sex organ* by the *male sex organ*. The fact that the person allegedly raped is the wife of the defendant shall not be a defense to a charge of rape. (Official Code of Georgia Annotated - Rape § 16-6-1 2009).

In accordance with this particular stance on sexual violence and rape in particular, past research has also placed emphasis on female victims and male perpetrators. In terms of the male perpetrators, one aspect of research has focused on men who are already sexual offenders. Voller, Long, and Aosved, discuss the possible correlation between attraction to violent scenarios such as violence against women and the sexual abuse of children to the commitment of sexual offenses. Results showed that the links are present but that it varies depending on the specific factor and the severity of the crime. Although the study does yield interesting facts, its methods only include using surveys. This particular study struggles to identify how these factors truly work within a social context mainly due to its quantitative nature. The United States Department of Justice has conducted multiple forms of studying sexual violence within the nation mainly using surveys (National Crime Victimization Survey 2007) and somewhat structured interviews over the phone (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Both major studies focused on women as the victims and men as the perpetrators as well as relied on statistical analysis in order to validate their findings. Such studies like the one conducted by Rice et. al, how sexual offenders can be measured for *repeat offenses* by systems in place by the American government.

Although the study does yield results that are necessary for the evaluation of sexual offenders, it does not offer the possibility of why or how these sex offenders have come to be in their present positions. With the emergence of studies on sexual violence as a subject, my findings have shown that current research still focuses on women as the main victims of sexual violence. Men are still statistically viewed as the perpetrators of sexual violence in all of its aspects. None of the studies concerning sexual violence, in terms of prevalence and prevention, really discuss how multiple factors such as media, family, and medical discourse are learned, embodied, and negotiated by the men. Most of the studies have stayed more towards analyzing existing data collection systems (Orchowsky and Weiss 2000) and providing statistical overview about sexual violence.

In terms of various forms of influence and negotiations, much of the recent research has focused on how men currently use information in forms of sexual communication. Sexual scripts have become prominent in discussing how men communicate with women in terms of sexual practices. In one study by O’Byrne, Hansen, and Rapely, the main aim was to assess whether or not men could and do commit rape based on “not knowing” about the refusal from their female partner(s). Other studies provide promising insight into how negotiations between cultural assumptions and actual practices are often quite different and fluid in terms of communication between partners (Beres 2009) and identification of relationships/sexual practices (Epstein, et al. 2009).

In analyzing sexual practices of men, recent studies have been focused more on the use of condoms and how men negotiate within the health realm (Woolf and Maisto 2008). Other forms of studies have placed emphasis on the presence of men within media and how media also influences their actions. In my literature research, multiple studies such as the one conducted by Fox and Bailenson focus on perceptions of the female body and appropriate behavior by male participants after exposure to different forms of media like an virtual environment. Kistler and Lee found that short term to certain types of hip hop music videos can influence men on their treatment of women within social settings. In this particular study, the men who viewed the more sexually explicit hip hop videos were more likely to be sexual permissive and violent towards women.

Overall, throughout my research, the current studies have failed to look into the sexual education of men outside of the realm of school or public health interventions. Also, recent

studies do not treat men as subjects but as objects of study. There is little information on their perceptions of sexual violence within the United States. Furthermore, there is a lack of information on how men come to think of sex as a subject as well as a practice. I hope to contribute to this library of studies by providing information on men as sexual subjects that are influenced by multiple factors yet negotiate within social contexts and how it applies to sexual violence.

1.4-Theory: Common Sense Expressed Through Intellectual Rhetoric

Situated Knowledges: You Need Your Glasses Fixed

“Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges... The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision” (Haraway 1988: 581, 582). Donna Haraway’s notion of situated knowledges describes how knowledge is constructed and reconstructed based on multiple sites of information. “Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway 1988: 583). Furthermore, the notion speaks of how skills and technologies determine many other factors such as who is deemed important in the information process or who should receive the information. Sexual education and sexual violence becomes an interesting site in which to study how knowledges come together within social situations. Not only is the concept of situated knowledges about the combination of multiple sources of information but also how that combination provides vision in different circumstances. It also becomes a question of position of the subject in relation to other forces. In the case of men, much feminist rhetoric places them in instances of power and the utmost agency. The notion of situated knowledges provides a space in which men are removed from their position of power and therefore can be analyzed because it allows race, gender dynamics, education systems, etc. to come into play. One of the biggest parts that I use is the notion of “vision”, of optics and the layers that are necessary to show a picture. I intend to show fully how these men look into sexual violence and sexual education. Haraway describes vision as something that is built, maintained, and reconstructed and therefore, so are the various standpoints of the subject.

“Vision requires instruments of vision; an optics is a politics of positioning. Instruments of vision mediate standpoints; there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated. Identity, including self-identity, does not produce science; critical positioning does, that is, objectivity” (Haraway 1988: 586).

By studying the sexual knowledge of men from the perspective of this particular theory, this thesis analyzes the various sites of knowledge and how the men utilize them in their sexual practices. In terms of sexual education and sexual violence, I find that this notion is an important part of the theoretical framework. For this thesis, I used “situated knowledges” as a way of looking at the contradictions between what is being said, how it is justified, and also how practices/utilization of sexual knowledges change or are altered in different circumstances. “The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another” (Haraway 1988: 586). Therefore, the information provided by these men will be used to create a vision of how sex is learned, in all of its variations, and how the education is used in daily interactions. The need to complete the vision and placing the gray within the overall scope is imperative. To over-generalize the voices of these men would be to make their thoughts very defined and static. Through Haraway, it is my intent to bring all of the blurring, the color, and the imperfections into the picture.

Gender Identity: How to be a Man’s Man

“Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler 1988). Butler discusses how gender is a performance that actually builds a reality within a social context. In other words, one must perform one’s gender in order to express to the audience (society) what one really is. She emphasizes the performativity of gender in which there is no essential masculinity or femininity but only a constituted reality. The way in which this notion of performance is concealed is through the repetition of the act, “that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (Butler 1988: 523). So, by analyzing the performance of gender, one can also look into notions of power and resistance within large structures. This thesis looks into gender as a performance, as a link to self-identity through which variations are abundant. Through the interviews, the emergence of trends in which the men express their gender and

sexuality According to Butler, gender is something that is created from a collective, from a consciousness that is not essentially true but it meant to be *shown* as true.

“Gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender—where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self—and desire—where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires” (Butler 1990: 30)

Also, along with the other theories, the multiple sites of knowledge play a crucial role into developing the act that is gender. In order for the men in this study to be known as men by society, they must perform their gender. Yet, not only must they perform their gender but they must perform it according to the cultural norms of what it means to be man, male, and heterosexual. “This appearance is achieved through a performative twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that `being` a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible” (Butler 1990: 25). This includes varieties of sexual practices and scripts as well. Examining how language is used by the men to express their sexuality and how it is juxtaposed with societal notions of African American male masculinity is the main focal point of using this particular theory. Although the theory itself is very vast, I have focused it more on language, physical acts and the meanings the men place behind them. In the potential framework of performance, this allows space for improvisation and play within the boundaries of male heterosexuality within the US. This thesis uses Butler’s theory of gender performativity in order to analyze how the men play with these boundaries, subordinate them. Chapter 2 will delve deeper into the notion of performativity in terms of sexuality, gender, and race. By looking at the fluidity of masculinity and male sexuality, there begins a look into multiple influences and that what is constituted as the truth is more or less the aggregation of various forms of information that is processed to fit the circumstance.

1.5-Thesis Structure: Down the Rabbit Hole

Now that I have discussed the subject matter for this thesis, it is important to illustrate how this body of work will be constructed. This thesis analyzes how sex, sexuality, and gender are learned, embodied, and practiced. Sexuality becomes a prism in which different forms of knowledge are internalized and therefore projected into social interactions. The intent of this

thesis is to attempt to understand how men make sexual decisions based on the different knowledges they have acquired over the years.

Chapter 1 has introduced the topic of discussion and has provided some background information to prepare the reader for the rest of the thesis. In Chapter 2, the theoretical framework and background is further expanded and clarified to establish a firm foundation for remainder of this work. This chapter will look further into Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges" and Butler's concept of performativity as well as the flexibility of gender. Also, the chapter will include data concerning African American culture in Georgia, the mainstreaming of African American culture, sexual violence laws in Georgia. Chapter 3 looks into sexual education both in the home/community and the education system. The focus is primarily on the information that was given to respondents. What kind of lessons were the participants taught? How is the information presented? What kind of content is considered age appropriate? Chapter 2 will offer a glimpse into American sexual education systems through the eyes of the participants. Chapter 4 examines the sources of information for sexual knowledges. In other words, Chapter 3 establishes the kind of information that men learn so Chapter 4 evaluates the sources which the information comes from. This chapter analyzes the various ways men come to learn about sex through family, friends, media, etc. In this chapter, the influences are examined in order to understand what sources of information men consider important throughout their lifetime.

Chapter 5 looks into the cultural aspect of sexual education and sexual violence from the standpoint of African American men. By looking to what is defined as contemporary African American culture in the southern United States, one can determine what boundaries and sexual scripts are established for the men. Furthermore, Chapter 5 brings all of the information into practice. How the men use the information in everyday social interactions. With their different sources of information, the question becomes which source is used in what situation? Here, the contradictions become prominent. Finally, Chapter 6 offers ways for men to look into sexual violence as a problem in the US. Recommendations for possible solutions are also the focus of this chapter. I also reflect on sexual education and sexual violence as a concept as well as an action from a standpoint as a scholar.

Chapter 2-Background and Theory: Can Sex, Race, and Violence be Rationalized?

“I am an invisible man. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.”

-“*Invisible Man*” by Ralph Ellison, page 3

“If you cannot understand what it’s like to be a tiger in a zoo, I don’t know how you ever going to understand what it’s like to be a nigga in America.”

-Katt Williams “*It’s Pimpin’ Pimpin’*” 2008

Before I continue with the background discussion and theoretical analysis, I thought that it would be prudent to explain the quotes that open this chapter. The first one comes from *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, a book published in 1952 that was and is still pivotal in discussions about race and America. I chose this quote specifically because of its aloof yet all encompassing nature. It speaks of how Black men in America are seen and yet, unseen. Furthermore, when they are seen often it is not on their own terms, at times they are seen as stereotypes; reduced to merely a select set of images. Yet throughout the novel the protagonist learns, little by little, about his identity and how to protect it. He learns that as a Black man in America, his self-identity is controlled by him and only him.

The other quote comes from a comedian known as Katt Williams. Although the joke proceeds to talk about a situation in which a tiger at the San Francisco Zoo attacks a visitor, he ties it in to social commentary about being Black in the America. It is about being caged, observed, being seen as both predator and prey. Perhaps I am over-analyzing but both quotes speak of the conditions for African Americans in America. There is a visibility and yet, there is *invisibility*. It is impossible to place African American culture in one solid mass of practices, literature, language, and media because there are too many layers, too many quirks. However, I intend to present a background to my story. To catch a glimpse into the demographic of Black men in Georgia and the influences such as music, literature, and history. Furthermore, the story

of rape in Georgia will be discussed in this chapter as well. Also, this chapter intends to set up the theoretical framework from which I draw more academic conclusions about the information gathered from the interviews.

Chapter 2.1-Background Discussion: Georgia on My Mind

As of 2009, about 30 percent of the population in Georgia identifies themselves as black or African American. According to the United States census, someone who identifies as Black or African American is “a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as `Black, African Am., or Negro`, or provide written entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian”. In America, Black history is American history and in the state of Georgia, it is no different.

The state of Georgia is located in the Southeastern United States, north of Florida and south of Tennessee. Georgia started as a debtors colony in 1733 and was the last of the thirteen colonies at the beginning of American history. The state would later become a producer of indigo, rice, and cotton which led to the importation of African slaves after 1751 for cheap labor. This mainly due to the warm weather conditions as well as the fertile land that composed the landscape. Georgia would join other Southern states to create the “Black Belt” which represented the concentration of cotton and slaves within the geographical area. During this time, relations between whites and blacks were that of oppressor and oppressed, master and slave. Slaves were not considered full human beings under the law of the United States. Although there are free blacks as well, majority of African Americans were slaves until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 which was a document that freed them. However, it was not until the Thirteenth Amendment which prohibited slavery in 1865, that slavery finally ended in the United States. After the Civil War (1861-1865) and Reconstruction in the 1860s and 1870s, the status of African Americans was a very precarious and unstable position. Georgia along with other Southern states would be known to have a set of laws known as Jim Crow Laws that would restrict the rights of African Americans.

“Whites feared that a New Negro, born in freedom, undisciplined by slavery, and unschooled in racial etiquette, could not be trusted to stay in its place without legal force. In response to this fear, the white South constructed an imposing and extensive system of legal and extra-legal mechanisms between 1890 and 1915 designed to institutionalize the already familiar and customary subordination of black men and women. State after state

denied blacks a political voice through disfranchisement, imposed rigid patterns of racial segregation nicknamed "Jim Crow" sustained an economic system tenantry and sharecropping that left little room for ambition or hope, and refused blacks equal educational resources ultimately, they "enforced ignorance." The criminal justice system operated with ruthless efficiency in upholding the absolute power of whites to command the labor and subordination of blacks. This was not the work of racial demagogues but of the "best people" the most educated, the most refined, and the most respected" (Litwack 2004: 7).

These laws would institute a practice of segregation such as prohibiting African Americans from voting through restrictions and separating public areas such as water fountains and restrooms. The impression of the Jim Crow South would continue until it is challenged during the Civil Rights Movement. Even though, today African Americans enjoy the same rights as all American citizens, there are still cultural connotations that pervade throughout the nation and in the state of Georgia.

It is important to understand slavery and Jim Crow in order to look into how racial stereotypes of African Americans and African American males in particular, were created and maintained. Even during all of these events that affected Black history in America, African Americans were able to forge an identity that rejected the connotations of White America, of mainstream America. Black consciousness movements like the Civil Rights Movement and leaders such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Marcus Garvey, and W.E.B. DuBois aided in creating a Black self. A positive definition of self and therefore a demand for that self to be respected and given the same rights as the White citizens of America.

Chapter 2.2-African American Culture: More than MTV and Maury

African American culture is poetic, creative, and fluid. Some of the largest examples can be found in music and literature. Jazz, Blues, Country, Hip Hop, and Rhythm and Blues (R&B) have made large contributions to the artistic landscape that is American culture. However, their roots are deep and display a cultural and societal sensitivity that at times is ignored by mainstream America. For example, the distribution of hip hop has produced a culture of its own that has moved from the urban scene and into the homes of suburbia. Current debate has surrounded the content and message of hip hop due to its blunt and at times violent substance. In this particular genre of music, Black male hypersexuality is exalted and given permission to be

violent, crude, and without regrets. However, the other side of hip often denotes a social consciousness about the condition of African Americans in America.

Often the violent nature of hip hop and rap is mainly directed at the oppression that silently continues in American society. Yet, the genre is also known to produce “misogyny, predatory sexuality, and violence” (Kimmel 2008: 163). To that end, one can see that in more mainstream hip hop and rap music. Not only has hip hop come under the attack of censure but the music videos that accompany them as well. In more of the hard core rap videos, women are often objectified being placed as things of enjoyment for the men within the piece. This has caused analysis on how this projection of women can be misconstrued in daily life. For some feminist scholars such as Kimmel, hip hop music influences the objectification of women and therefore can influence sexual violence. In some instances, such as in dance clubs, sexual permissiveness is accepted even encouraged by both men and women. In one study, Michelle Kistler and Lee Moon wanted to find out if the videos themselves had any effect on college students. Within the study, they exposed both male and female students to various hip hop videos ranging from very tame to highly exposed and observed the behaviors as well as the attitudes of the students afterwards. Their findings suggest that the students were influenced, if only for a short time, by the more graphic videos. The female students became more sexually permissive and the male students had less regard for physical boundaries (Kistler and Lee 2010). What is interesting it that often the debate about the influence of hip hop and rap tends to be very distinct and unyielding in describing characteristics. Either the genre is ruthlessly violent and vile or it is the poetic voice of a disenfranchised group of people. Either way, hip hop is known to speak to many groups of people with an international appeal that can be seen in various parts of the world. In terms of sexuality, music had become a place for free sexual expression often commenting on the sexual politics of the time.

There has been much literature on the multiple layers that helps to describe African American culture in all of its complexity. African American literature has been used to express sentiments within the Black community ranging from such works as Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Each unique in their presentation of life for African Americans, all brought different angles and situations that are faced by Black men and women in America. Interestingly enough, some of the key literature in African American culture comment on the sexual politics. In works such as *Why Does a Slave*

Ever Love? by Angelo Rich Robinson, the notion of romance and love become a defining feature in addressing the humanity of African Americans, particularly during slavery.

“Romantic desire is considered peculiar to humans, an emotion that signifies humanity. To suggest that romance is practiced by African Americans is essentially to admit their humanity. The suggestion of romance, therefore, was untenable for a society that insisted that African American men and women were beasts. Key to such a conceptualization was a sexualized depiction of them that inexorably negated the possibility of romance” (Robinson 2007: 41).

Some of the major contributors to Black consciousness and African American studies include Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Davis. They will be used to help describe African American culture as well as the history of racial politics. Racial stereotypes concerning African Americans were often negative and were meant to uphold the subordination of Blacks. To narrow the scope, for this thesis, I will mainly focus on the sexual stereotypes of African American males. Essentially, the racial stereotype suggests that Black males were and are seen only as hypersexual beasts that are incapable of deeper affection. As commented on Robinson’s articles, most of the thoughts regarding Black sexuality and romance placed those terms at opposite ends.¹ With this came the concept of the Black rapist, a mythical creature that “has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications” (Davis 1981: 173). Literature surrounding the myth of the Black rapist often challenges this antiquated ideology however I feel it has been transformed into an entirely different creature in today’s society. Now, the literature surrounding Black men and sexual violence, or violence in general, often deals with “providing more Black male role models for Black boys in contemporary Black political theory and practice” or trying to understand phenomenon such as gang violence, “thug” mentality”, and poverty. However, this merely reduces the Black community to social problems and nothing more. When addressing sexual violence as a subject for prevention, criteria like socioeconomic status and exposure to violence become discriminating factors (Voller, Long and Aosved 2008).

¹ Bell Hooks and other scholars comment on the polarization of Black sexuality and its correlation with controlling stereotypes. In terms of Black male sexuality, Black men can either be seen as the overly aggressive sexual beast or the asexual fatherly-type.

Chapter 2.3-Feminism: Not Just for the Ladies

By taking a feminist perspective, I argue that the concept of gender and its many definitions is not only a woman's issue but a man's issue as well. It is important to understand that as women are controlled and sometimes objectified by their sexual makeup, their physiology, and their cultural surroundings; men find themselves in the exact same area. Men are given a freedom because of their sex, their gender but at the same time, they are restricted by it. They are simultaneously sexualized and desexualized, broken down and built up by the same standards and rules that chafe women. I know that this might appear to be somewhat radical in its application but throughout the interviews, I have seen the men try and display their sexuality and firmly place in an area where one cannot dispute their heterosexuality. In terms of sexual violence, men have been removed from the conversation as if they are no longer capable of understanding such concepts. Majority of the academic work on sexual violence focus on men as perpetrators, as statistics that are not capable on commenting about their place in the overall discussion (Orchowsky and Weiss 2000, Tjaden and Thoennes 2000, Understanding Sexual Violence: Fact Sheet 2007). In feminist theory, most comment on the subordination of women through patriarchal mechanisms and how men are essentially have been using power as a way of domination. Yet, in studies of sexual violence men are reduced to basic sexual beasts, unable to control their urges or perhaps just "born that way".

Donna Haraway describes situated knowledges as a show, a construction of vision that is constructed from different parts that are interchangeable and ever modifying. In this vein, she explains that there can never be a complete sense of objectivity because of the multiple points of view. One can never be an objective outsider, nor can one be an omniscient insider because one's position is always shifting. Also, how things are viewed and analyzed contributes to the overall conclusion. "All components of the desire are paradoxical and dangerous, and their combination is both contradictory and necessary" (Haraway 1988: 579). In this statement, it is more of a reflection of how in order to view a picture or even create one that it both accountable and accurate can cause a slippery slope. In order to address sexual education and sexual violence from the Black male perspective, one must be able to understand that one cannot and will not be able to see the entire picture. Studies into sexual violence and other sexual phenomena tend to take on a God-like persona. Often drawing conclusions that are definite, finite, and static which seems like an attempt to place such blurry concepts into easy-to-manage spaces. This is meant to be applied to prevention programs and encourage statistics so that we may "understand" the problem. Haraway is calling to do away

with that system of thinking. Essentially by placing truth within a relativistic view of things, we as social scientists can never and should never strive to be completely objective, the subject matter is too messy and rightfully so. This thesis is merely a show of the mess, of the stickiness that is sexual violence and the human response. The voices of the participants cannot be placed neatly into a well defined box, conversly it is my intention to leave the voices as they are.

Judith Butler's notions of performativity and gender identity states that gender itself is not a static term and therefore cannot be applied concretely. Because of its fluidity, one can place a gender where one sees fit. However, due to the performativity of gender identity, it is something that is constantly created, then destroyed only to be recreated once more. This concept can also be applied to race and ethnicity. Firstly, Butler's concept of performativity for both gender and ethnicity is perhaps better explained by Joane Nagel's discussion on ethnicity and sexuality:

“Ethnicity is both *performed*-where individuals and groups engage in ethnic presentations of self, and *performative*-where ethnic boundaries are constituted by day-to-day affirmations, reinforcements, and enactments of ethnic differences. Ethnicity is thus dramaturgical, situational, changeable, and emergent. An individual's ethnicity is presented and affirmed or not in various social settings; it is a transaction in which the individual and others exchange views about the true nature and meaning of an individual's ethnicity, where negotiations are often necessary to resolve disagreements, where adjustments in ethnic self-presentation and audience reaction may occur over time, and where ethnicity is a dialectical process that arises out of interactions between individuals and audiences” (Nagel 2000: 111).

Studies on sexual education and sexual violence tend to reflect on how both are demonstrations of power. In the United States, sexual violence is shown as an action of power, or domination. At the same time, sexual education teaches that sex is power, dangerous, and should be approached with caution. During discussions of sexual violence, the subject of gender identity comes into play. Men in the United States need to be seen as sexually aggressive in order to be seen as sexually viable. However, for male sexuality, aggression is a way of empowering and expressing virility, power, and control. Studies on sexual violence try to connect violence whether in music (Kistler and Lee 2010), video games (Fox and Bailenson 2009), or other forms of media (Palmer-Mehta 2009). Interestingly enough, the body becomes a place where all of this is acted upon. In terms of sexual violence studies, I think that contemporary discussions surrounding aggression in regard to violence and coercion look into the use of language as well as the creation of specific discourse about male sexuality (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006, Epstein, et al. 2009, Kimmel 2008, O'Byrne, Hansen and Rapley 2008). Male sexuality is judged

and thus defined by the level of aggression used by an individual to obtain a goal of any kind. In finding a sexual partner for example, a man who is somewhat aggressive towards a woman in regards to sexual advances is most likely seen as “persistent” in his endeavors. He has to demonstrate a certain amount of control and power over his specific form of aggression in order to prove that he is an acceptable, mature, sexual man. According to Western societies, control of one’s aggression is directly linked to control of one’s passions or emotions as stated in the first section. Sexuality is a space in which identities are created for display and tactics are used although it is not to say that sexuality is a deceiving act. In the instance of examining male sexuality, aggression’s multiple transformations shows the room that is available for negotiations such as the use words such as “persistent”, “focused”, and “driven”. These transformations within the language of aggression suggest that concessions are made in order to accommodate aggression in the social context. In order to rationalize the use of the irrational, one must reiterate as the action in very soft language. This can prove to be problematic because the language makes the action harder to decipher something that is harmful and meant to influence through intimidating tactics from something meant to persuade. The line for sexual violence is blurred due to the language used because the victim might say that the perpetrator was overly aggressive while he might say that he just being persistent. When looking into sexual violence, we can see how power plays a very large role in producing discourse surrounding the subject. In other words, if the subject can be viewed as a product of representational politics and thus a creation of power, then it stands to reason that the distinction of sex and gender follow the same trajectory. She argues that the entire distinction is problematic because since sex is seen as natural and gender as cultural, it becomes problematic due to the fact “it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males” (Butler, 1990) and vice versa. Essentially, one can never “be” a “complete” man or woman because in the same voice as Haraway, the vision changes, who is viewing changes and therefore, one’s position is never secure, never definite.

Chapter 3-Sexual Education: Trade of Information

“I learned a lot and I learned about, you know, the diseases, what the consequences, the bumps on the penises. Everything, I mean studied that to the tee!”

-Peter age 24

Sexual education is a broad and ever expanding topic that encompasses multiple arenas of knowledge. For the men in this study, the notion of sexual education only begins to take form during their adolescent years. For some, it began early in life. While visiting one of my participants at his mother’s home, I was able to hear some advice that was given to him. Anthony’s mother, a tall woman with a strong and humorous personality, has told him since that age of 10, and this is a direct quote, to “not stick your dick in anything you’re not ready to be responsible for.” That advice has followed him to this day. However, this is not the only piece of information he has kept with him throughout his adolescence and burgeoning adulthood. The treatment of women was also something that became part of his education as well. “I was taught to treat women how you would want your mother, or your sister, or your cousin, or whoever that your feel close to in your life to be treated” (Anthony 2010). Looking into the information that is imparted to these men shows other notions of the construction of sex, sexuality, and violence. In this chapter, I will analyze the type of information given to the men. Moreover, it is their thoughts on their own education that will be more telling about how they have processed this information. As with Anthony, some of the information stays and is later applied in their typical sex lives however, it is my intent for this chapter to examine the information and look into terms of content. I will first analyze sexual education outside of the classroom then proceed to look into the American education system. Finally, I plan to describe the presence or lack thereof of sexual violence education in some sexual education discourse.

3.1-Sex Ed in the US: Not Just in the Classroom

The quote at the beginning of the chapter came from Peter, one of the men that I interviewed. Seen as a charismatic man who currently resides in the city of Marietta, Georgia

and works as a delivery man for a car part business. At the time of the interview, he had been in a few relationships but had engaged in many casual sexual encounters. With a profound sense of pride, he stated that the number of partners was at 84. Currently, he claims that that number has risen to over 100 partners total. Peter represents a self-assured young African American male that is still enjoying his youth through expressing his sexual prowess. In the larger scheme of things, he also represents how sexual education becomes integrated into one's personal life. Later he commented that during his adolescent years, "I never thought I would be one of those guys who would have tons of partners, lots of one night stands" (Peter 2010). Interestingly enough, his thoughts on sex at the age of 7 mainly consisted of "just laying on top of a person and you make up and down motions. I didn't know that you were supposed to put it inside something" (Peter 2010). That particular quote came during his description of his sexual education in high school. In the United States, the sexual education of children, adolescents, and young adults fall into two main realms: the family and the education system. The American education system is not fully controlled by the federal government thus making decisions such as curriculum and age appropriate content the responsibility of the individual state. In terms of the education system, the debate on content in sexual education programs varies from state to state ranging from abstinence-only education, to what is labeled as fully comprehensive sexual education. During the Bush Administration, the federal government allocated funds to schools that promoted abstinence-only education. Abstinence-only education focuses on students waiting until marriage to engage in sexual intercourse, i.e. vaginal intercourse. While abstaining from sexual activity does reduce the instances of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), these programs have often failed to include accurate information about sex. On the other end of the spectrum, comprehensive sexual education programs offer information about condom use, STIs, and HIV/AIDS. Yet, as stated before sexual education is not strictly relegated to schools. Often the information is learned in the home environment which includes the home and neighborhood as well as areas that would be considered "sexual spaces". Some of the arguments surrounding sexual education in the schools come from parents who believe that it is the responsibility of the family to educate their children. In the case of Anthony, sexual education is a subject that needs to be learned not only in the classroom but outside of it as well. "And that [sexual education] comes with street smarts, you can book smart somebody on sex all day all you want, but that's not going to give them the actual experience other than getting involved or being

around that type of situation or seeing it” (Anthony 2010). This quote represents how even through large structures are used to inform the public, there is an importance placed on experience. Experience becomes the trend for all of the men within this study. Although school and family introduces the topic of sex, it is the experience that really solidifies the information for them. This presents a space where one can analyze how individual beliefs can influence the masses through large-structure processes which in turn filters back to micro level interactions. I will argue that the debates concerning age appropriate content actually hindered the distribution of knowledge in regards to sexual violence. Furthermore, the lack of targeting men as a demographic for sexual violence education also means that they are once again left out of the discussion.

3.2-Sex in the Classroom

While analyzing sexual education, it is important to understand that sexual education within the United States remains centered on vaginal intercourse. American vernacular surrounding the term “sex” and what is defined as sex continues to mainly use vaginal intercourse as the starting and end point. This leaves other sexual acts such as oral and anal sex to be ambiguous as well as scapegoats for those who attempt to fulfill the “wait until marriage” philosophy. Furthermore, while interviewing the men about their sexual experiences the differentiation between what is constituted as actual sex also demonstrates how linguistics applies in overall education.

For the men that I interviewed, majority off their sexual education began around the age of 12 to 14 years old. This age is indicative of the time when most boys begin the stages of puberty and begin to realize their sexuality. Mostly, the people surrounding the men during this time became proactive in educating them on sex, sexuality, and what it means to be an African American male in America. Although, for some, exposure to sex began even earlier their lives, their interest in the subject as a concept as well as a practice started around this time. Overall, the active conversation about sex coincided with their physical sexual awakening.

Interestingly enough, by the time majority of the men were given sexual education in school, they had already engaged in vaginal intercourse. Out of the 10 men interviewed, eight of them had had vaginal intercourse as well as oral sex by the age of 14. The information that is provided in middle school, mainly between the ages of 11 and 13, often speaks about the changes

in the body associated with puberty such as hormonal fluctuations, deepening of the voice, and so on. In high school, the content shifts to prevention of the transmission of sexual diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis as well as preventing pregnancy among the teenage population. In the Georgia school system, these sex ed courses were taken by the men around the age of 16 or 17 as provided in physical education courses. This gap provides an interesting space in which to view how men learn about sex within a formal institution. The school system appears to assume that teenagers do not engage in any form of sex until later in their adolescent years, i.e. closer to the age of 18. According to my findings, by the time they actually take the course, many of them have first-hand knowledge of sex through experience. This contradiction between assumed age of experience and the actual age of experience, provides an instance in which we can observe what is expected of teenagers and young adults in American society.

In some instances, such as the case of David, a 22 year old immigrant from Kenya, conflicts between two different cultures often lead to various conclusions surrounding sex. In his native country of Kenya, sexual education in schools included a somewhat frank discussion about transmission of HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy. He described his sexual education as part of an overall health course that was part of his regular curriculum at the age of 12. I was intrigued when he told me about how the class was taught particularly with the use of role play by the students:

“So they taught us about condoms, using protection. But we went to a Christian school so they emphasized the most effective way to protect yourself from STDs, or pregnancy, or unplanned pregnancy is to be abstinent. And we actually did a couple plays and scenario. And I’ll never forget this. Because I was the hooker in one of them! I was in a group with a couple of my best friends and someone had to be the girl and I definitely lost that coin toss. I had to be the ho. I had to put on a pair of heels and I took my school uniform shirt and I mean once I was in I was going hard, you know. I was not going to half ass this! So I grabbed my girlfriend’s heels. I took my shirt and I tied it up tight here [indicating slightly about his navel] so you could see my stomach and I played the ho for the day!” (David 2010)

The laughter that came during this particular part was easy, almost comforting. It was interesting to see him travel back to this particular memory. It made me wonder if the memory was more enjoyable because of the ridiculousness of it. However, what was more intriguing was how seriously he took the role. Most guys that I have had conversations with would have had a harder time playing the role of the woman. Perhaps because it was a school exercise, it became easier to switch roles temporarily. His masculinity did not and therefore would not come into

question although he was essentially cross dressing as a woman, a prostitute. Yet, this reminds me of my time in high school when sometimes during school events or skits, the boys would wear the skirts or t-shirts of their female friends. It seems that in middle school and high school, the strict definitions and regulations of gender can be suspended. So, school presents a space where one can participate in a kind of “gender play” while learning to define their sexuality in their own right. Yet, although the action is considered playful, the meaning and the lesson behind the scenario carries a serious connotation.

“It was just a scenario. I can’t remember the exact scenario that we played out but it was something along the lines of if you have sex with someone you don’t know you could contract something that they got as well as get them pregnant and have a responsibility for the rest of your life. These scenarios that we were doing in class were based off of worst case scenario. It would be that I got AIDS and pregnant and I gave my baby AIDS. The education in Kenya really tried to be blunt about sex education and put it in your face” (David 2010).

After this statement, the gravity of the scenario seemed to reclaim him. One could tell that this particular event was important and had a profound effect on how he would come to think about sex and health. It was almost sobering to see the facial transformation, the body language changed as he fully remembered the purpose of the exercise and what it meant in the larger scheme of things. In terms of Haraway, the full vision, the entire picture began to come together. The lines were drawn and being blended to show how he felt about the scenario and his final statement about the activity seemed to place this conversation into perspective.

“I’ll never forget the feeling we had; we all had, after we acted out these things. And yes, we had a good laugh and all but the seriousness of what we were portraying was blatantly evident” (David 2010).

When I asked him about the transition from the Kenyan education system to the American education system in terms of sexual education, he stated that at his high school the sexual education was part of a physical education course. “They taught us abstinence based sex ed. They covered the diseases in detail, they showed pictures of the infections of some of the diseases... it was quite gross. And that’s all I remember from that. Truthfully, the only thing I took from that damn class was that if you had sex you might get gonorrhea and gonorrhea kinda looks like this and by that time I was already having sex” (David 2010). The complexity of both lessons demonstrated how information is allocated in order of importance. Even though he learned the same lesson from two different sources, he found that the lesson he learned in Kenya

was more profound and therefore, more important. When he spoke about his formal educational experience in the US, he appeared to see it as a joke. Also, since he was already engaging in sexual activities the information became irrelevant. He represents the majority of the men in this thesis. Because they were having sex before the sexual education, most found the information to only be somewhat useful.

3.3-Sexual Education and Sexual Violence: Sex is About Love, Right?

The role of sexual violence within the general education in regards to sex remains a subject that finds an audience on college campuses. “Colleges and universities have been aware of the problem of sexual assault for at least 20 years, directing resources toward prevention and providing services to students who have been sexually assaulted. Programming has included education of various kinds, support for Take Back the Night events, distribution of rape whistles, development and staffing of hotlines, training of police and administrators, and other efforts” (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006: 484). These programs that focus on sexual violence often try to center on rape, i.e. sexual assault. However, organizations such as the Center of Disease Control, state that sexual violence is “any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone's will. SV encompasses a range of offenses, including a completed nonconsensual sex act (i.e., rape), an attempted nonconsensual sex act, abusive sexual contact (i.e., unwanted touching), and non-contact sexual abuse (e.g., threatened sexual violence, exhibitionism, verbal sexual harassment)” (Understanding Sexual Violence: Fact Sheet 2007). Again there is a contradiction between the language used in every day vernacular and that proposed in medical and political policies. What is interesting yet quite terrifying about this is that like the middle school and high school education, there is an assumption that sexual violence is something that would only occur once someone enters college, usually around the age of 18. This maybe due to the fact that majority of attempted and successful sexual assaults in the United States are reported to happen to women of college age, i.e. between the ages of 18-24. In fact according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), college age women are four times more likely to be sexually assaulted. Yet, as stated before, although this seems like a very effective way to address sexual violence particularly on college campuses, it becomes problematic due to the time and availability of these services. Firstly, by waiting until college to teach about sexual violence and sexual assault, teenagers are left out of this valuable knowledge.

Secondly, since most of these services are provided through the college systems, those who do not attend college are also denied this information and therefore have to find other sources of information. Trey, a 24 year old father of three, remembered his time in college. When I asked him if the university he attended offered services on sexual education, he replied, “they did but I was in college. I knew everything. I felt like I could teach them about sex at that point” (Trey 2010). For some of the participants, Trey included, college represented a form of freedom. Peter said that after he left high school, he became the “biggest man-whore” (Peter 2010). They all seemed to go one of two ways in college, either they stayed in committed sexual relationships or they dramatically increased their number of sexual partners.

What is fascinating about sexual violence education is that most of the services are attended voluntarily and are gender biased. The courses and/or programs mainly target female students and offer ways for them to aid in preventing becoming victims of sexual violence or should they become victims, provide services where they can address what has happened to them. In this study the men that I interviewed, majority stated that these programs were part of the health services on campus. All of the men had at least attended some college and during their time there, none of them utilized these services. Yet, this was also the time that most of them were exposed to the horrors of sexual violence. Either the situation included someone at a party who was drunk and raped or knowing someone who was sexually assaulted. I personally know about four women who have been sexually assaulted, they were all under the age of 26 when this happened. David from the earlier chapter states that “it [sexual violence] has a very ugly face. I’ve known someone that was very close to me that was sexually assaulted, she was raped” (David 2010). It appears that by catering the services for female students and making such programs voluntary, there is a real disservice to the male population. It is important to remember that statistically men are the main perpetrators of sexual violence. So would it not be logical to make sure that these programs cater to both the male and female population? Because although women are more likely to be victims of sexual violence, that does not necessarily mean that men cannot be victims as well. Actually, one in every 33 men have been victims of some sort of sexual violence in America. Also, the threat of incarceration and the possibility of being labeled a sex offender is something to consider as well. Often the men felt that by college, the need for sexual education was unnecessary and since the programs were voluntary in nature, most of

them did not attend. Somehow, the knowledge not seen as valid due to their experiences. In other words, what is the point of attending a program that discusses things you already know?

3.4-Conclusion: Sex Ed is the Ultimate Confusion

This chapter analyzed how the respondents remembered and thought of their formal experiences with sexual education. Content and what is deemed age appropriate has made sexual education a subject to be debated and discussed. Yet, during these debates it appears that there are many contradictions such as the difference between the age the men actually engaged in sexual intercourse and when their sexual education began in school. It is fascinating to see what the men took from these classes as well. For Peter, the need to understand the diseases and how to prevent them became a critical in producing his knowledge about sex. David provided a vantage point to examine larger structures such as the American school systems. In his case, what is deemed an early age for sexual education and HIV/AIDS prevention in America was and is considered appropriate for children in Kenya. The tactics of the American school system only provided to demonstrate how STIs can affect one's life. Yet, the common thread between the two men in this chapter is the distance between the age of the sexual education and the age of sexual contact. Actually, it is safe to say that their sexual education began the moment they started to have sexual intercourse in its many variations. In terms of a college education, it seems that sexual violence does not make an entrance until this time. Assuming that the average age for a freshman college student is 18 years old, this means that sexual violence in the United States is seen as an adult problem. It is something that comes with leaving the safety of home and wondering into the world of adult situations. This also coincides with the freedom one might have from one's parents. By looking into how sex is learned in an institutional environment, we can begin to see how larger structures affect or do not affect the thinking of individuals on the micro level. The addition or subtraction of content also dictates how we view childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. This is a demonstration of how the right to knowledge is both deemed and not deemed by the individual. Although these men received some sort of sexual education, they still were the deciding factor on what parts of the education they were going to learn and apply in their daily lives.

Chapter 4-Influences: Sources of Information on Sex, Sexual Pleasure, and Violence

“One of my good friends showed me porn for the very, very first time. And then I proceeded to go over his house for about a month and watch porn with him where he showed me everything...”

-David age 22

4.1-Medicine: A Condom a Day Keeps the Doctor Away

Today, medical discourse dominates views on sex and sexual practices in the form of sexually transmitted diseases, condom use, pregnancy, the Pill, etc. Sex and sexuality became something that could be measured and controlled by physicians and psychology. In current sexual education within the United States, there is emphasis on the potential transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Although the education varies from state to state, most of the courses are encompassed by sexual/reproductive health. The importance of condoms and being able to identify potential symptoms of STDs is something that the United States has promoted since the 1970s, 1980s. One of the main diseases that have taken the forefront in US medical discourse is HIV/AIDS. Sex seems to be no longer a pleasurable act in which one can blindly participate, but a responsibility that one must take seriously to ensure a long, healthy life. Majority of the men in this study reported that they do use condoms in their sexual encounters for various reasons ranging from preventing pregnancy to preventing transmission of STDs. However, in practice some of the men would actually weigh the options in terms of wearing a condom. In one particular case, a participant named Anthony said that he used condoms in a rather creative way. He used them as a way of ensuring consent from his sexual partners. In order to be sure that his partner wanted to engage in sex, he would have them go and get the condom from his drawer, in what he calls the “Walk of Shame”. “If she really wanted to have sex with me, then she needed to go and get the condom herself. That way she could change her mind before we had sex. If she didn’t want to have sex, then she would not get the condom and she could walk away” (Anthony 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 2, most of the men talked about the disease portion of their sexual education class. More often than not, that was the main part of the program especially in high school. For me, I remember an exercise that we had to do in our sexual education course. The students were all given a test tube with a clear liquid in it. We were then instructed to mix our fluids with others in the class; this was meant to simulate the exchange of fluids during sexual intercourse. At the end, our test tubes were tested with a small strip of paper. If the paper turned blue, then one had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. What I found the exercise to be an interesting looking into teenage courtship because students were refusing to mix their fluids with people they did not like or people they did not want to be known for liking. Overall, the course would end with a slide show that displayed physical symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases. However, I remember the lesson being focused, once again, more on the female population due to remarks about the irreparable damage that could be done to female reproductive system. However, with the emergence of disease-focused sexual education, the need for learning about sexual violence is left in a marginal space. Does it not seem imperative that one should learn how to report a sexual assault? Again, in the previous chapter, we have learned that sexual violence is removed from sexual education until college thus leaving a multitude of audiences in the margins. It is important to remember that one can contract a sexually transmitted disease through sexual violence and sexual assault.

The emphasis on a clean body places importance on sexual practices as well. In an age where diseases are everywhere, antibacterial soap is compulsive, and vaccinations are mandatory, we can see how sexual health is at the forefront of sex talks. Yet, again it should be noted that although promoting safe sex is imperative; we should include sexual violence in discussions about health because it is a medical problem. Trauma is done to the body and often there is some form of repair that needs to be done. Diseases are just one of the factors that are part of the medical discourse within the United States. However, one should also understand that sexual violence needs to be seen as a medical problem, as an issue that not only affects the body but the mind as well. Furthermore, the inclusion of men is as important as including sexual violence in the overall discussion.

4.2-Family: It Begins at Home

All of the men unanimously agreed that sexual education was something that should be taught at home. That it is the responsibility of the family as well as the community to educate people on the different aspects of sex. Different views on women and how to treat them respectfully were topics that were brought up during the interviews. For majority of the men, their family unit consisted of one parent, usually the mother and siblings. For some, there was little to no contact from the fathers while for other, the fathers were present in their lives if not living somewhat near their sons. In the case of Luke, the concept of family goes even further. At the time of the interview, he had three children with the fourth one due a few months after. What I found was a more realistic look into how families take on the task of teaching their young men about sex. Two of the men I had interviewed presented two very distinct views on sex and therefore access to sexual knowledge via family and friends. Each had some kind of a conversation about sex with their parents. Also, their environment helped influence how they were to think about sex in the future.

Jeremiah, a 31 year old college graduate from a university in Atlanta, Georgia and a teacher; remembers sex as a subject that was described by his parents as something that was natural and perfectly normal for him to experience. “I was aware of how babies came, I was aware of what sex was, how I got here. My mother’s a feminist; she’s an activist, that type of stuff. So, you know, it was a positive outlook on sex, it was a positive outlook on women. She emphasized the importance of respecting women” (Jeremiah 2010). He presented a rather different picture of sexual education because his mother in particular began the dialogue *before* he reached puberty. In fact, conversations with his mother concerning sex began to fade away as he got older. Yet, with the departure of his father at the age of 14, his mother seemed to push for other things as well such as never leaving one’s children. While being raised in a rather politically aware family, he would later find conflict when it came to issues of porn and masturbation.

According to Ty, a 22 year old college graduate with a Bachelor’s in International Affairs and a Christian conservative, sex was something that was considered taboo. Currently, he still lives with his parents while working towards financial and personal independence. His Christian background emphasized saving oneself for marriage. Interestingly enough, his parents did not

talk to him about sex very much. By placing sex in a space that was off limits to him, Ty's parents did not necessarily see a need to provide information about sex to their son. Sex was an act that was meant for those who were married, never before. Therefore, sex was not discussed in the house. When I asked him if he ever really talked to his parents about sex, he seemed to react rather strongly with an intensity that suggest that such a thing is disgusting as well as awkward. Then a memory of his father talking him seemed to emerge during the conversation. "I remember one car ride with my Dad, we were talking or whatever... he was like `Justin, don't you want a girlfriend?' I was like `No. Not really.` And he said `If you need some help, I can teach you some tips, man.` But I never really tried to push that forward. `Nah, Dad. I think I'm good. Thanks.` (He laughs) But girls were never really explained to me" (Ty 2010). When it came to his later sexual adventures he felt that it they were not things that one should discuss with one's parents. "I really don't like to share things with my parents, cause I will get in trouble for it" (Ty 2010). Although Ty has a younger brother, he states that he did not really want to talk to his brother about sex. "We don't talk about sex and girls in our home, between ourselves. It's kind of weird, but that's the way it is." (Ty 2010). The same conservative values applied to the younger sibling as well. However, this presented a rather conflicting picture because although sex was/is taboo in the household of Ty's parents; Ty still went through the physical sexual awakening that is puberty. He became a fan of breasts in particular and actually went as far as knowing a girl who would allow him to grab her breasts during middle school. When he entered college, he would show another contradiction by having two casual sexual encounters on two separate occasions with two different women. When I asked him about this, he replied "as far as my sexual history, I'm kind of ashamed. Cause I feel like those two one-night stands... I could have done so much better than that, you know what I'm saying? But I decided to, like, waste my virginity on that. On those two girls" (Ty 2010). The subject of sexual education and age appropriateness showed that Ty seemed to differentiate from his parents in opinion.

"That is something we need to talk about now. Cause you how more liberal say we need to explain to kids how to use condoms, I... I kinda feel that same way. Cause you're not going to stop, you not going stop kids from doing this [sex] so why keep them ignorant about ways to prevent them from, you know, pregnancy. I mean they feel that you shouldn't teach anything about condoms. Kids should not have sex before they're married. And you're a virgin when that happens" (Ty 2010).

4.3-Music: Video Vixens and Love Songs

In today's American society, terms like "whore" and "slut" have transformed within the context of African American vernacular which in turn has penetrated White America. We see this in the proliferation of hip-hop and R&B music as well as the popularity of urban fashion and culture in the 1980s onwards. Music discusses the criteria used for labeling women as well as what type of sex she is to receive based on her status. In the world of hip-hop, the "freak" and the "ho" reign supreme in more hardcore genre as women who are sexually promiscuous but also use sex to get what they want in life. They are also women who will do anything sexually to please her partner. Songs, such as "Freek-A-Leek" by rap artist Petey Pablo, describe a woman who is attractive yet is willing to perform sexual acts that are considered socially kinky, or "freaky". He describes her as:

"24, 34, 46 [her measurements in inches], good and thick,
and once you get it she'll work with it.
Pretty face and some cute lips, earring in her tongue
and she know what to do with it.
Make a name for herself, and she do her shit well,
and know how to keep her business to herself." (Pablo 2004).

Further into the song, he lists names of women who he associates with the title. Other rappers have come out with songs that deliberately define women with "ho-like" behavior such as Ludacris' "You's a Ho". Since hip-hop pertains more to the club scene, most of the sexual interactions happen within dance clubs and strip clubs. More often than not, alcohol and drugs are also involved. According to one study (Kistler and Lee 2010), exposure to hip-hop videos with high sexual content does impact the level of objectification of women for men and for women, it increases what was labeled as "sexual permissiveness". In the study, the men seemed to take more latitude in terms of personal boundaries and therefore, allowed themselves to become more sexually aggressive towards women. For Peter, music helped create and establish the criteria for identifying potential sexual partners. "Music help me go to the club and identify what's a ho... You see a girl break it down to the middle, comin' out her clothes... Now she's damn near naked. Hell yeah, you know I don't want that chick I want her friend because that chick is doing that and I know her friend is like that too" (Peter 2010).

In terms of exposure to music videos, most of the ones the men referred to were hip hop videos. In these particular videos, the women were often scantily clad and would surround the main music artist. It projected a notion of money, power, and sexual prowess. Women in these

videos are often seen as objects to be used sexually by the men. However, for the men in this study, the women present a visual of what they would consider “easy. As Peter stated, the stereotype remains as a foundation for finding women for casual sexual encounters. There is also a promotion of violent or “rough” sex. Sexual activity takes on a more animalistic nature and for some of the men, it translated into practice. One participant went so far as to state that men who listened to rap/ hip hop seemed more likely to “smash”, which means to have a casual sexual encounter, to get in and to get out with sexual gratification as soon as possible. When we look into hip hop music, we should also recognize the variations within the genre. When I speak about the music the men listen to, the main genre within hip hop that speaks about “rough” sex and “ho’s” is what we would consider hardcore rap. Other variations actually produce a positive view of women and provide more substance in the lyrics.

Yet the music genre of rhythm and blues, better known as R&B, tends to present a “positive” aspect of labeling women. On the contrary, much of R&B (rhythm and blues) music is more about softer sex or “loving making” in which not only is it about the partner but concentrates on the emotional side, or love in relationships. The genre of music produces the stereotype of the “lady” by attaching this particular sexual activity with the label. It seems that in R&B, these labels are positive and are meant to project a woman who is self-sufficient, confident, and poised. Also, for the “lady”, it is about longer relationships that are built on emotion as well as sexual pleasure. If we look into the history of R&B, many of the songs are about love, potential heartbreak, and caring for your partner in a relationship. Songs such as “Put That Woman First” and “Woman” speak of a woman who is deserving of respectful treatment by all men, especially her partner. Other songs encourage holding on to these women because they are rare and thus it is imperative that a man understands what a “lady” is in person. Also, these songs became a means of seduction. Many of the men had used music as a way to learn how to seduce their future partners. Such artists like R Kelly and Brian McKnight were popular with the men in this study. Many of them went as far as creating music mixes on CDs in order to “set the mood”.

Of course, it is also important to note that with all social phenomenon, even these particular genres of music switch with each other and present a more grey version of life. If music attempts to display a more black and white vision of sex/sexuality, then how do men take these influences and apply them to their daily lives? Essentially, the influence of music and

music videos lasted mainly through puberty and during the men's early sexual awakening. When I asked the gentlemen about their stance on music and its influence now, all of them stated that there comes an age when you realize that the images and scenarios represented are mere projections of the imagination. That it is all part of an industry whose sole purpose is to make money through commerce. Analyzing the transition of views on music and its influence from adolescence to adulthood, speaks about sex and sexuality are very unstable concepts. The fluidity also shows how the personal feelings concerning sexual pleasure as well as the balance between violence and sex are continually converging and diverging.

4.4-Porn, Internet Access and Movies: Totally Visual

Pornography played an interesting part in producing the sexuality of the men. I originally thought that the porn served mainly as a form of entertainment. That is was a way for the men to pleasure themselves through the act of voyeurism. Yet, the most of the men used pornography for a different purpose. For some of the men, it also served as a learning tool. Pornographic videos primarily provided a guide of how to be a better lover. In other words, the men would utilize some of moves shown in the films in their own sexual lives. For them, the videos became a more realistic way of looking into sex as an act. Furthermore, it is also important to know that porn often became the first introduction to sex due to the visual stimulation of it. In his younger years, Jeremiah found an interest in porn; "yo, I used to plan my day around watching... I got a brand new porn. That shit was like Disney World for me! Because back then, this was before DVD, was before all that shit. You get a porn tape that your homeboy let you hold, you like 'I'm going to jack-off like five times tonight!'" (Jeremiah 2010). For Ty, porn was his first foray into sex as an action, as a subject of interest. He began looking at porn on the Internet at around the age of 10. The main website of interest was sex.com and he began looking at the porn as a thing of interest, mainly looking after school while keeping it a secret from the family. However, he was eventually caught by his father some time afterwards who told him to stop viewing the porn. Both of them present how modes of technology enabled them to discover sex and look into sexuality as heterosexual men. However, the perceptions of what they deemed as violent sex seemed to place them in a space of contradictions. Both men saw certain aspects of pornography as violent, dehumanizing, and negative. In talking to Jeremiah, he stated that at times he had bouts with enjoying porn and his own knowledge of gender representations and political views

osex work in general. When we spoke about what he thought about pornography, he expressed, “I always associate porn with a whole lot of enjoyment and I know all of the other ramifications that come with it. You know as far as the obvious sexism and the negativity... you know, it’s like prostitution and all kind of bullshit. But that’s a part of the excitement. What always intrigued me about porn is that I can’t believe she’s doing this for any amount of money, like, it’s really blowing my mind! So, that intrigued me. The kinds of things people will do on camera for a couple of thousand dollars” (Jeremiah 2010). Even though, Ty enjoyed porn, there were certain types that he found to be too much for him. In particular, threesomes or orgies that involved more men than women often gave him the notion of violence, of violation. He preferred to view pornography that maintained a more traditional view of sex in which the couple consists of a man and a woman. In both cases, porn demonstrated to them what sex was as an act: fierce, passionate, and ever climatic. At the same time, sex was and is presented as violent and therefore, both men had to make a kind of peace with the amount of violence they would view in their porn.

It seems that although porn, mainly in the form of pornographic videos, provided and still provides entertainment and sexual release for the men in this study; it also offers a conflicting and individualistic view into sexual desire. Also, by looking into pornography in terms of sexual violence, one can see that personal boundaries are being created and acknowledged by the individuals. Chapter 5 will actually look into the individual concepts of sexual violence in practice. For now, pornography can be viewed as an object used for the sexual gratification of the men while acting as an education tool. Interestingly enough, pornography is a subject that crosses many boundaries for both men and women. When looking through the eyes of the men in this study, there are different boundaries in terms of deciding what is considered violence and what is considered consensual sex. It brings to question where the line is drawn with sex and violence. Are the two intertwined? Can they ever be separated? I will attempt to answer these questions in the following chapter.

4.5-Conclusion: So Many Sources, So Little Time

In this chapter, I aimed to argue that different sources of information provide diverse types of data for the men in this study. The sources show who and what the men deem as important and at what stage in life these influences have to most control. Many of the more

superficial sources of influence such as pornography and music tend to fade as the men got older. While medical discourse surrounding sex and healthy sexual practices remain constant throughout their sexual lives. Yet again, the contradictions between information and action become clearer during the interviews. The men speak about their experiences and yet, there are conflicts. We see this in the cases of Jeremiah and Ty in regards to their stances on pornography. Looking into the family life, there is a trend of experience where although the men may talk to their parents about sex, it is seeing and experiencing the ramifications of sexual activity that really influence them later on in life. What we are beginning to see, is that the sexual education of the men in this study is coming from actual experience, through the active development of one's own ideology.

Although there are some similarities such as the proliferation of medical discourse within sexual education in the United States, one can see how the information is internalized and therefore projected by the individual. By examining the effect of macro structures like medical discourse, music, and family, we can begin to see how those large processes remain individual in nature. Essentially, these macro structures only become the size that they are through the sheer mass of individuals who use them. There is a proactive sense of being with these men. The sources of information available to them still lack notions of sexual violence. They know that committing an act of sexual violence leads to disastrous consequences such as being labeled as a sex offender and therefore becoming part of a national database that is available to the American public. In the following chapter, we will further look into their sexual practices and how sexual violence fits into it as a whole. By examining notions of sexual violence through practice, I will argue that the contradictions will present a clearer picture of sexual violence, sex, and sexuality as a whole.

Chapter 5-Practice: Do Not Talk About It, Walk About It

“Women are taught how not to be victims but men are not taught how not to be perpetrators.”

-Personal Reflection

In essence, how do the participants in this study feel about sexual violence? “Sex is supposed to be a comfortable thing. It’s not supposed to be uncomfortable, so when you throw in the violent aspect of it you’re scarring somebody for life” (Anthony 2010). “I asked my dad, ‘what does rape mean?’ and he said ‘it’s when you beat someone up really bad’” (Ty 2010). “I don’t think it’s called for. [It is] anything that is not normal sex” (Peter 2010). “Sexual violence is taboo but it is as real as anything. It’s out there and it’s hidden behind a curtain. But it’s everywhere, it’s everywhere. It has a very, very ugly face. It’s the big elephant in the room that when it happens to somebody, they don’t want to talk about it” (David 2010). “I think it was the way you were brought up. It takes a certain kind of person to be able hit a girl. You have to have something wrong with you” (John 2010). Although these are a few direct samples of what sexual violence is to the men in this study, the overall feeling is that sexual violence is negative, inherently bad. Even more fascinating is the thoughts about sexual offenders. John and the others place sex offenders into a place all of their own. Sex offenders are removed from society in that their sexuality is taken from them. They are not seen as human beings or if they are, they are viewed as imperfect. Sex offenders are animalistic beings that either “not raised right” or merely malfunctioning. By placing them there, the men in this study can therefore show what they are *not*. In this chapter, I will analyze how the participants practice *not* being sexual violence perpetrators, essentially how they define themselves as sexual beings by applying their sexual education to their sexual practices.

5.1-Sex and Rough Sex: Their Little Bag of Tricks?

We have established that according to the participants, sexual violence is wrong. A debilitating practice and/or action that can scar the victim and essentially remove the perpetrator from sexual society, either way it is dehumanizing. Furthermore, some of the men had expressed

a fear of being accused of sexual violence for some reason or other. John states that “there’s always *those* women who lie” or falsely report being raped to cover up their indiscretions. “I’ve never had sex with a girl who’s drunk, I never had sex with girls who do drugs. Because it may be cool at that time but once that girl remembers, that’s when you could go to jail. You just got your life messed up over some twat” (Peter 2010).

The concept of the line between rough sex and sexual violence seems to be clear for the participants. Mike says” I draw the line when it’s no longer wanted. If it’s not wanted, then it stops being rough sex and it starts being sexual violence. If it starts going from `yes, yes, yes` to `please stop`, or `stop it hurts` and you’re not stopping, then it’s sexual violence. And you can tell when someone’s enjoying themselves” (Richard 2010). Some of the men have had to really looked into what makes *them* comfortable during sex. I asked them were their times when they were asked by one of their partners to do something that would make them uncomfortable. The responses are very telling. There were instances of women wanting the men to hit, slap, choke, and in some cases thoroughly engage in hitting before having sex. For each respondent, the tolerance level was different. In the case of Richard, it is all about consent. And for the rest of the men in this study, that rule still applied. Peter talked about his experience with a woman who wanted him to choke her and how he balanced the line between sexual pain/pleasure and physical harm. “I’m into the foreplay, getting in and getting things started. I like to watch the facial expression the whole time. If the girl is trying the hold her facial expression straight then I’m not pounding it hard enough and that’s when I turn into this angry guy. Pull their hair, choke their neck, slap their butt. Choking though when they start turning red that’s not what I do. It’s a slight choke” (Peter 2010). However there are more tricks to the trade. In the case of Richard, he had a strategy called the “Walk of Shame” in which he would tell the girl to go get the condom out of his dresser drawer before they had sex. “This way she can change her mind at anytime between the dresser and the bed. If she doesn’t want to have sex, then she can refuse to get the condom. It’s my way of making sure” (Richard 2010).

For the respondents, the possible chance of going to jail because of an accusation of sexual assault is something that they think about occasionally. For most, there have been examples in the media of careers ruined by rape accusation such the Kobe Bryant case in 2003 when a popular professional basketball player was accused of sexual assault by a woman. The case was later dropped after Bryant apologized to the victim and the victim refused to testify.

However, it placed a space where sexual violence is something to be feared and possibly used as a weapon by women against. Either way, the respondents were cautious in most of their sexual encounters. As we have seen in the case of Peter and others, the restriction of alcohol and drugs is a must. This is due to laws that state that a person who is incapacitated due to the influence of drugs or alcohol is not in the frame of mind to consent to sexual activity. Therefore a woman who is drunk and has sex can report sexual assault to the authorities.

5.2-Sexual Violence: Can't Try to be Superman

Perhaps the most frustrating part of this process was when I learned of instances where some of the participants were at the scene where sexual violence occurred. Peter regaled me with a story about a time in his teenage years.

“I was in Tennessee and it was about four years ago, I was 20. I was visiting my brother at school and he had a house and his teammate had a house next door. I went inside the house and this white girl came over with her friend. I dared her to drink the rest of the vodka. It was probably about an ounce left of cheap vodka. She chugged it and in a matter of 10 minutes she was done! So she went upstairs and fucked her boyfriend. Her boyfriend threw her in the bathroom so he could claim another chick in the house and have sex with her. She's throwing up all up in the toilet and her pussy's all out. She was all over me and I didn't want to be part of that. I said, 'Are you okay? Do you need anything?' She said 'I'm fine. Even though he fucking some other girl.'”

Now it would seem that this would be the end of the story, however it does speak to the level of concern over her present state. Yet, we can see how alcohol will play a role in the situation as the story continues. During the interview, I could see that even then he seemed conflicted over what had happened and what actions he should or should not have taken. Nonetheless, the situation only seemed to escalate further as more men became aware of the young woman's drunken state.

“So I guess, other guys tried to go to the bathroom and seeing her on the ground throwing up so they put her in a room. When they put in a room, this one dude started popping her and saying 'Oooh, she ready.' And then everyone was talking about getting in line and taking turns. I went downstairs. I felt bad because I took law enforcement and I know I'm supposed to be the kind of person to be like 'No, leave her alone. You don't want to do this.' But people make it seem like you can stop a beast, a dude in heat from having sex with a female who's messed up. You can't stop another dude unless you fight him. Now, I'm going to go to jail for fighting this guy for not trying to do something to this girl. No matter what you're going to get into trouble so I went downstairs” (Peter 2010).

He proceeded to tell the story of how one particular guy went upstairs and had sex with the incapacitated young woman. She would later wake up to see the face of her rapist yet even

later on would accuse and then recant her story about being raped. This is not the only instance that I had heard about women being raped while drunk at a party or get-together and the participants did nothing to stop it. However, this also speaks to a sense of self-preservation. When I asked why they would not interfere, it came down to not wanting to get into trouble due to fighting. Also, it spoke more of familial ties. In other words, if the woman in trouble was not somehow linked to the participant either through family or friendship ties then she did not have the automatic protection. I found this out when I asked the respondents if they would act the same way if the woman was a close friend or family member. Actually, if it was someone who was close to the respondent then there was no questioning about interfering in the situation. “If it was you [the author], there wouldn’t even be a problem. We [he and some of his friends] would make sure that nothing would happen to you. I dare someone to try that with you” (Anthony 2010). There was a moment when I have three of the respondents plus a few additional friends in a group and I asked them why they saw no need to interfere. One spoke and said, “Why should I fight this dude and possibly more dudes over some chick I don’t know, especially if she put herself in the situation in the first place? I could go to jail for that. It’s better just to get out of the situation before anything happens” (Dre 2010).

5.3-Prevention and Action: What Can Be Done?

While discussing sexual violence with the men, I decided to see where they thought men should be placed in the dialogue about prevention. Seven out of ten of the respondents said that there was really nothing to be done about sexual violence. As stated before, the respondents agreed that those who committed sexual offenses seemed to be born that way, their actions were inherent. When speaking about why men seemed to outnumber women in sexual offenses, it came down to physical strength and the need to display power. In their own terms, men are physically stronger than women and therefore can physically subdue a woman enough to commit sexual assault. However, they also spoke of the need to reestablish one’s manhood. Essentially, it is all about power whether physical or metaphorical in nature. William, a young man of 23 and father of a toddler, said it best. “That [child molestation] would really affect your manhood. Especially if you feel like you’re a straight guy but you look at your past and you were raped by a man as a little boy. It’s almost like an ego trip. It’s to the point that it was wrong, it happened, you’re dealing with it, but at the same time you have to physically force yourself on women to

try to prove you're a bigger man" (William 2010). Again, this reiterates the thought that those who commit such actions are already made that way, it is something that is intrinsic.

However, there is hope in the suggestions that came from some of the participants. Most of them recommended types of programs that promoted "real" relationships. In their terms, it means talking about safe, loving relationships where women are seen as something more than sex objects. But the most profound suggestions came from William and David. William suggested getting more exposure about sexual violence outside of the mainstream media such as the *Law & Order* television show franchise. By placing sexual violence within a more social commentary such as teen talk shows and on popular channels such as Music Television (MTV) and Black Entertainment Television (BET), the word about sexual violence would talk on a more realistic appeal. David recommended that older men should perhaps mentor younger men in ways that are acceptable for the treatment of women. However one may want to break the cycle, the only goal should be to *break the cycle*. Furthermore, in order for this to happen, both women *and* men should be part of the dialogue. Yet, some of the participants felt differently.

In discussing sexual violence with the participants, the responsibility for preventing sexual violence seemed to fall back on the women. This goes back to the earlier discussion about how some men were born to be sexual offenders and therefore only women can learn to protect themselves. Yet in some instances, when a woman needed someone to step in, it is evident that in the end *she* and only she is responsible. It presents the notion that in a country full of manly men, or so they like to think, one should not expect integrity or even common courtesy. More importantly, this kind of behavior shows what kind of problem sexual violence has become: it is a female problem. "All I can say is that women need to learn to protect themselves because there's always going to be some dude who wants it [sex] no matter what" (Peter 2010). "There's nothing the men can really do because there's always going to be someone out there that's going to do it [sexual assault]" (Anthony 2010). Again, it is a mixture of what can be done if someone is born to be this way or what to do because male society does not pay attention. By making it a personal problem, men can release their responsibility in dealing with sexual violence and they can do the same thing if it is classified as a societal problem. Either way, even by having a few suggest that men step back into the sex area besides being mere bodies shows that maybe men are placing themselves back subconsciously.

5.4-Conclusion: Proactive Nonchalance

This chapter looked into the sexual practices of the participants and its connection to notions of sexual violence. Throughout the chapter, one can examine a plethora of examples in which the respondents seem to take charge of their sexual lives. The analysis began with how the men in this study used sexual strategies to encourage and validate consensual sex with their partners. The examination of sexual practices continued with a discussion about how thoughts of sexual violence translated into instances where they were exposed to it and their reaction to the situation. For most, it was became a notion of knowing that the situation was wrong but also knowing that any action taken by them could result in negative results. Next, I wanted to know what the men thought that could be done within the United States to look into sexual violence. Again, we can observe the contradictions between what is being said by the participants and what they do. Here, majority of them believe that the potential for sexual violence is something that someone is born with. Yet, they are simultaneously and proactively taking steps to prevent sexual violence from happening in their sexual lives. The actions taken by the participants, such as refusing to have sex with incapacitated women, shows a consciousness about sexual violence and the ramifications it can have one's life. All of the participants have made statements about how accusations of sexual violence can ruin careers and lives of the accused, and that fear of accusation manifests into sexual practices. Even if sexual violence is considered a female problem, it has become apparent in this chapter that sexual violence reaches much further. Perhaps the notion of victimization is what separates the issue of sexual violence. This chapter shows that the concept of sexual violence works on the conscious and subconscious level of male society. In other words, on a conscious level sexual violence is something that targets primarily women and therefore is something the women must proactively engage in order to truly combat it. On a subconscious level, sexual violence affects men in a totally different manner. The accusation of sexual assault is a bigger threat than actually being sexually violated. Even in their own words, the accusation of sexual violence can leave long lasting scars that heal at a slow rate

Chapter 6-Conclusion: Down the Rabbit Hole and Back Again

“And since we all came from a woman, got our name from a woman, and our game from a woman.

I wonder why we take from our women, why we rape our women, do we hate our women?

I think it's time to kill for our women,

Time to heal our women, be real to our women”

-“Keep Ya Head Up” Tupac Shakur 1993

This thesis looked into how sexual education affects the thoughts and perceptions of sexual violence among a small group of African American men located in the state of Georgia in the United States. This body of work analyzed how sex and sexuality not only defines how males become men but also how they learned to project their masculinity to the world. I intended to explore how the sexual education of the group functioned on both the micro and macro levels of society. By examining how the education was embodied and interpreted through notions of sexual violence, I planned on addressing issues of content, consent, and the concept of boundaries. The way men interpret what constitutes sexual violence provides a glimpse into notions of sex, violence, and identity.

Chapters 1 and 2 presented the main questions I had surrounding sexual violence and how men, African American men in particular, were placed within the discussion. I used the theory of “situated knowledges” by Donna Haraway and gender performativity by Judith Butler to illustrate how the dialogue about sexual violence is fluid and therefore constantly changing. Both theories described how the men looked at their position within the discussion of sexual violence yet also how they used their sexual knowledges in order to produce their sexual selves. Haraway became important in understanding the stance the men took on sexual education and sexual violence. Mainly, I used her theory to look into the contradictions between what was being said and what was done in the men’s sexual journey. I wanted to show how these contradictions actually produced “partial truths” of what the men thought about sexual violence and the actions they took in their sexual lives. In essence, their voices created a visual, a picture of multiple resolutions through which I could discern meanings. It also provided that I could and

would never be completely objective, that my stance as an academic, as a researcher, and as a woman were not as concrete as I had once thought. Butler provided a way of looking at their sexual behavior and their behaviors in general as something that is created, broken down, and therefore recreated on a constant basis. The performativity of their gender became a dance that is to be continued for the rest of their lives and yet in this instance, I could see how they were still learning the steps. This thesis also looked into how these intricate steps were learned, embodied, and practiced. For both Haraway and Butler, the most important factor is the voice. Therefore it was my goal to utilize and actually hear the voices of these men. Their voices had to be placed in a context where the attention was paid and the reader is left to draw their own conclusions.

The background of Georgia, of African American men in America, and sexual violence studies overall provided the backdrop to my thesis. I included a history of Georgia so that one could imagine the area and its culture. A place of Southern charm and country courtesy, it also has a dual history of oppression and bigotry. In particular, I decided to add a quick analysis of African American male sexuality because it would help to describe the expectations that some of the men live up to. Not only do they have to be sexually viable men, but they also have to be sexually viable *Black* men which in turn does take some of its characteristics from the sexual stereotypes. Overall the background discussion looked into how sexual violence studies tended to focus on victims, prevention strategies for potential victims, and how to deal with sex offenders. The statistics were there and the voices were present as well however the other side of the story was not there. Men's voices have been left out of the dialogue not only in sexual violence but also in sexual health as well. By bringing this particular issue to light, I had hoped to set the stage for my own research which was acted out in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Chapter 3 found that the sexual education of men was a conflicting set of information and required that the men as adolescents work their way through that information. For most of the men in this study, the information either augmented their burgeoning sex lives or was merely omitted due to their sexual experiences. By looking into sexual education from an institutional standpoint as well as from experience, we can see how the information was chosen for specific activities. One can also see how the participants determined which kind of information was deemed important. Issues of content and age-appropriateness also became a topic of discussion. When is a good time for schools to begin sexual education? What kind of information is appropriate for different age groups? And why does sexual violence not make an appearance

until college? These questions were somewhat answered by the respondents and that presented a view into how American culture deals with sex, sexuality, and sexual violence. What was more intriguing was that for majority of the participants, the sexual education that was provided within a formal setting came *after* they were already engaging in sexual activities. So, the contradiction, or perhaps the wishful thinking, of adults in that teenagers do not have sex until later on seems to offer a space where sex can be explored although secretly. Also, the space between when teenagers actually have sexual intercourse and when information sexual information is deemed appropriate shows a discontinuity between the real and the projected.

Chapter 4 showed the different sources of information that the respondents determined were used to gather information on sex. The main sources were family, pornography, and music with particular emphasis on hip hop and R&B. As with Chapter 3, the men in this study developed a hierarchy of sources and also these sources became a way for them to further develop their notions of sex, sexuality, and sexual violence. On one side, sources such as pornography and music are rather temporary while medical discourse remains prevalent throughout their sexual lives. It appears that pornography and music are temporary in nature as more of an introduction into sex. Medical discourse has a more practical application and therefore continues to be used in the lives of the participants. Contradictions allowed the men to figure out what they deemed as suitable sexual perceptions and that would later translate into their sexual practices. By looking into the sources of information and how they are categorized, one can also observe what is being made available to men and its surprising lack of sexual violence education.

Chapter 5 brings the information learned by the participants into practice. The examination of practice demonstrates the true contradiction between what is learned, what is embodied, and what is projected. In this chapter, I analyzed how the men proactively practiced sexual tactics such as not having sex with someone who is taking illegal substances or are otherwise incapacitated. Also, the need to understand how the men would act in instances where sexual violence was happening provided a way to fully comprehend to the choices made. Furthermore, this chapter looked into what the men thought could be done by other men in regards to addressing sexual violence in the United States. Overall, the conflict between sexual violence and sexual practices showed how even though sexual violence is seen as a female problem, the men in this study took lengths to prevent any chance of accusation. The fear of

accusation of sexual assault for men seemed almost synonymous with the fear of being sexually assaulted that women experience. To fight this fear, the participants developed a set of tactics that they would use. This chapter endeavored to explore these practices and moreover found that perhaps the men do think about sexual violence, just in a different context.

In essence, the men in this study do care or at least think about sexual violence. However, it has been placed in a different space. The sexual education of the men in this study is as diverse as the men themselves yet they appear to have reached the same conclusions. Their sexual education created a foundation on which they could mold their own sexual ideologies. This led to the adaptation of sexual practices that would help define their sexual selves. In regards to sexual violence, their thoughts and practices provided a viewing into their fears about the topic. So I believe that it is imperative to acknowledge their genuine voice, their place within discussions concerning sexual violence. As I have stated before, by leaving men out of the dialogue we are removing half of the equation. They are a variable within the discourse whether people want to acknowledge that fact or not. Either way, the voices that are presented in this study are mere glimpses yet are profound in their contribution to the overall conversation about sexual education and sexual violence.

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