

# Male Power and Female Victimization: Toward a Theory of Interracial Rape<sup>1</sup>

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Previous research in criminology assumes that rape is primarily an intraracial phenomenon. But empirical studies since the late 1950s have shown substantially higher rates of black offender–white victim (BW) than white offender–black victim rape. The present study tested two models of BW rape on a set of 443 rape victimizations collected by the National Crime Panel from 1973 to 1977. The normative model interprets BW rape as a correlate of increased social interaction between black men and white women. The conflict model interprets BW rape as a correlate of increased black politicalization. The results did not support the normative model and only partially supported the conflict model. Discriminant analysis showed that the characteristics of victims were unrelated to BW rapes and that BW rapes were less likely than other rapes to follow legitimate social interaction between the victim and offender. By contrast, BW rapes were no more violent than black or white intraracial rapes. Implications for a sexual stratification theory of interracial rape are discussed.

Sociologists have long been concerned with the distribution of criminal behavior by race. Given the history of black-white sexual segregation in the United States (Woodward 1955), researchers (e.g., Partington 1965; Wolfgang and Riedel 1975) have been particularly concerned with the determinants of official reactions to sexual assaults. Prior research has shown that black men accused of sexually assaulting white women receive more serious sanctions than other sexual assault suspects. But no research has examined whether interracial rapes are in fact different from intraracial rapes. In this paper I expand research on sexual stratification by race by comparing the characteristics of inter- and intraracial rape cases. My purpose is to deter-

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mine whether the behavior of rapists, like the behavior of agents of the law, depends on the victim's race.

#### RATES OF INTERRACIAL FORCIBLE RAPE

Paranoia concerning the protection of white women from sexual assault by black men is a legacy of American slavery that has frequently served as a focus for racist exaggerations about black men (Myrdal 1944; Curtis 1974, p. 19). This may explain why most empirical research on interracial rape is limited to questions of whether and to what extent agents of the law discriminate against black men (e.g., Partington 1965; Wolfgang and Riedel 1975). Until recently, this focus seemed justifiable. Amir's (1971) widely cited study of forcible rape in Philadelphia concluded that only 3.3% of all cases known to police in 1958 and 1960 involved black defendants and white victims. Similarly, only 3.6% of the sample involved white offenders and black victims. Literature on rape in the 1970s (e.g., Griffin 1971; Brownmiller 1975) adopted Amir's conclusion that rape was largely an intraracial phenomenon. But beginning with Reiss (1967), empirical studies have shown higher rates of black offender–white victim rape than those reported by Amir. Table 1 summarizes proportions of interracial rape by year from the empirical literature.

Table 1 includes only studies based on crimes known to police or reported in victimization surveys. Data collected from hospital records (e.g., Holmstrom and Burgess 1978) or rape crisis centers (e.g., Medea and Thompson 1974) are excluded. Two features of table 1 are worth noting. First, every study following Amir's shows a higher proportion of black offender–white victim (BW) rape than white offender–black victim (WB) rape. In several studies (e.g., Mulvihill, Tumin, and Curtis 1969; MacDonald 1971; Nelson and Amir 1975) the proportion of rapes that are BW is more than 15 times greater than the proportion of WB rapes (significant at  $p < .0001$ ).

A second feature of table 1 worth noting is the relationship between the proportion of all rapes that are BW and year of data collection. For example, BW rapes constituted 3.2% of Amir's 1958, 1960 sample, 5.0% of Reiss's 1965–66 sample, and 10.5% of Mulvihill et al.'s 1967 sample. After 1967, the proportion of all rapes that were BW was never below 12.9% (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration [LEAA] 1979) and several studies reported proportions over 40% (Nelson and Amir 1975; Hursch and Selkin 1974; Seattle Law and Justice Planning 1975). Thus, the proportion of all reported rapes that are BW appears to have increased in the last two decades.

Researchers who have noted similar discrepancies in proportion of interracial rape for blacks and whites (e.g., Nelson and Amir 1975; Curtis 1976; Holmstrom and Burgess 1978) have generally assumed that black women are less likely than white women to report interracial rape. But the recent availability of national victimization data (LEAA 1976, 1979) makes this assumption doubtful for two reasons. First, the National Crime Panel (NCP) is based on interviews with random samples of the U.S. population rather than official records. Thus, it is less susceptible to the nonreport biases which threaten the reliability of official data (Hindelang

TABLE 1  
FREQUENCY OF INTERRACIAL RAPE BY YEAR OF OFFENSE

Source	Year Collected	Sample	N	Black Offender-White Victim (%)	White Offender-Black Victim (%)
Amir (1971)	1958, 1960	Philadelphia	646	3.2	3.6
Reiss (1967)	1965, 1966	Chicago	459	5.0	1.0
Mulvihill et al. (1969)	1967	17 U.S. cities	465	10.5	.3
Nelson and Amir (1975)	1968-70	Berkeley	158	60.8	.6
Hayman and Lanza (1971)	1969, 1970	Washington, D.C.	2,248	20.8	.4
LaFree (1979)	1970	Indianapolis	272	24.6	.7
Agopian et al. (1974)	1971	Oakland, Calif.	180	34.4	2.2
LaFree (1979)	1971	Indianapolis	105	33.3	2.0
MacDonald (1971)	1971	Denver	165	27.3	1.8
Wilson (in Curtis [1974, p. 27])	1972	Washington, D.C.	739	19.0	.3
Brown (1974)	1973	Memphis, Tenn.	535	16.0	.6
Caruso (in Curtis [1974, p. 27])	1973	New Orleans	189	29.1	.5
Feder (in Curtis [1974, p. 27])	1973	San Francisco	578	38.4	2.7
LaFree (1979)	1973	Indianapolis	300	21.3	1.3
National Crime Panel (LEAA 1976)	1973	United States	69	30.4	.0
Seattle Law and Justice Planning (1975)	1973	Seattle	305	51.1	.7
Wilson (in Curtis [1974, p. 27])	1973	Washington, D.C.	641	21.0	.5
Herron (in Curtis [1974, p. 27])	1974	Philadelphia	670	15.8	.3
Hirsch and Selkin (1974)	1974	Denver	545	40.3	.0
National Crime Panel (LEAA 1976)	1974	United States	113	25.7	3.5
LaFree (1979)	1975	Indianapolis	308	22.4	1.6
National Crime Panel (LEAA 1976)	1975	United States	116	12.9	2.6
National Crime Panel (LEAA 1976)	1976	United States	110	21.8	.0
National Crime Panel (LEAA 1976)	1977	United States	45	24.4	6.7

NOTE.—Mean BW offenses = 25.80, SD = 13.46; mean WB offenses = 1.45, SD = 1.599; student's *T* = 8.49, *p* < .0001.

1978).<sup>2</sup> Table 1 shows that from 1973 through 1977, the proportion of rapes that were BW reported by the NCP ranged from 30.4% (1973) to 12.9% (1975). The proportion of all rapes that were WB ranged from 6.7% (1977) to 0% (1973, 1976). Combining the yearly NCP results from 1973 through 1977, BW rapes were 10 times more likely than WB rapes.

Second, victimization data allow assessments of the victim's reasons for not reporting crime. Analysis of these data (e.g., Skogan 1977) indicates substantial similarity in the reporting behavior of black and white victims. Thus, recent empirical studies show that BW rapes are more common than WB rapes, and this difference cannot be explained by differential reporting by race.

#### TWO MODELS OF INTERRACIAL RAPE

Few studies have explored possible explanations for black-white differences in rates of interracial rape. An exception is Curtis (1976) who offers two tentative explanations for increasing rates of BW rape. Both explanations begin with the assumption that America is a highly stratified society with race-specific rules of sexual access.

The normative model interprets increased rates of BW rape as precursors of changing normative patterns. This explanation rests on Durkheim's (1950, p. 71) conceptualization of crime as an indispensable component in the normal evolution of morality and law. Crime prepares the way for social change and helps to determine the forms change will take. Thus, increases in rates of BW rape may precede changing normative patterns in black-white relations. For blacks, greater occupational and social equality breaks down racial barriers imposed by the sexual stratification system and makes greater black-white interaction possible. As barriers fall, blacks become more willing to seek out whites as acquaintances, friends, and sexual partners. For whites, rejection of racial prejudice increases cross-race interaction. Thus, the normative model interprets increases in interracial rape as unavoidable correlates of increases in legitimate interaction between blacks and whites.

Unfortunately, Curtis (1975, 1976) does not explain why increased interracial social interaction leads to increases in BW but not WB rape. The crux of the normative model is that greater social interaction leads to crime and, thus, anticipates social change. But the empirical studies reviewed in table 1 strongly suggest increases in BW and not WB rape.

<sup>2</sup> My argument is that victimization studies are less susceptible to bias than official sources, not that they are totally unbiased. For example, Levine (1976) argues that victimization surveys are subject to respondent, interviewer, and coding biases.

Thus, for the normative model to be viable, we must assume that black men have increased their interaction with white women but that the amount of interaction between white men and black women has remained constant.<sup>3</sup>

Curtis's second model takes a conflict approach (see Quinney 1970; Chambliss and Seidman 1971). Conflict theorists (e.g., Collins 1975, p. 282) argue that sexual access, like other scarce resources, is determined in large part by power relationships between societal subgroups. In its extreme form, during the period of American slavery, the sexual stratification system placed few constraints on sexual access to black women by white men but severe constraints on sexual access to white women by black men (Woodward 1955; Stamp 1956). The sexual stratification system continues to provide a pervasive set of sexual access rules (Heer 1974; Stember 1976). Cleaver (1968) and others (e.g., Hernton 1965; Poussaint 1972, p. 2) argue that violating these rules challenges the authority of white society. Thus, Curtis (1975, p. 78) interprets the rape of white women by black men as "the penultimate way for a black male to serve up revenge on his white male oppressor. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

#### CONTRASTING NORMATIVE AND CONFLICT MODELS

Longitudinal data on defendants' and victims' attributes and behaviors in interracial rape cases could resolve the complex issues raised here. No such data exist. But normative and conflict models also raise different expect-

<sup>3</sup> Curtis's (1975, p. 79) argument applies only to social interaction between specific black offender-white victim dyads. But Durkheim's (1950, pp. 70-71) conceptualization of crime suggests that changing relationships between blacks and whites in general might also prepare the way for social change and serve as a pretext for BW rape. Thus, we must distinguish here between two related normative explanations. The more specific addresses the question of whether BW rape is more likely than other categories of rape to involve victims and offenders who had some prior legitimate interaction. The more general addresses the question of whether changing perceptions of normatively acceptable interracial social behavior increases rates of BW rape. My analysis only addresses the specific issue. To assess empirically the more general issue requires data on the attitudes of rapists in BW rapes. But methodological limitations of the three major criminal data sources (i.e., self-report, victimization, official) make it unlikely that valid data on this issue will ever exist. Self-reports are of limited use for serious crimes like rape, victimization data can provide only limited information on offenders, and official data reflect a highly select sample of all rapists.

<sup>4</sup> The conflict model need not assume that every interracial rape represents a conscious political act on the part of the rapist. The motivations of individual offenders are no doubt more complex (e.g., Gebhard et al. 1965). However, the deviance literature (e.g., Sykes and Matza 1957) shows that awareness of unjust social relationships may provide a justification for criminal behavior. Moreover, Comer (1967) argues that radical black politics are not limited to students and political activists but may also be found among lower-class, less well-educated blacks.

tations regarding the characteristics of interracial rape. These differences relate to (1) the victim's attributes, (2) the interpersonal context of the incident, and (3) the amount of violence involved in the incident.

The normative model suggests that rates of BW rape increase with legitimate interracial contact. This model assumes attitudinal and behavioral changes in white women as well as in black men. Curtis (1974, p. 79) and others (e.g., Poussaint 1966; Nelson and Amir 1975; Brownmiller 1975, chap. 7) argue that younger, college-educated, single, white women are likely to have more liberal attitudes toward race and are therefore more likely to interact with black men and thus be victims of interracial rape. By contrast, age, education, and marital status are irrelevant to the conflict model. If BW rape represents a political attack on a sexual stratification system implemented and maintained by white males, then the offender is not primarily interested in the characteristics of the victim (apart from her race). Rather, he is interested in striking and getting away.

Both models also make different predictions about the interpersonal context of BW rapes. The normative model predicts that BW rapes frequently follow legitimate social relations between victims and offenders. It emphasizes the victim's willingness to interact with the offender and the offender's increased confidence in this interaction. Thus, the normative model predicts that BW rapes are more likely to involve (1) acquaintances, (2) incidents which occur in the victim's home, (3) incidents where the offender had a right to be at the scene of the offense, and (4) assaults by a lone offender. All of these variables suggest legitimate interaction between victim and offender prior to the rape. Also, the normative model emphasizes that the victim in BW rape often contributes to her victimization by placing herself in a vulnerable position (see Nelson and Amir 1975; Curtis 1975, pp. 80–81). Thus, for rapes which occur outside the victim's residence, the normative model suggests that BW rapes are more likely to occur at night.

In contrast, the conflict model assumes no prior interaction between victims and offenders. Thus, BW rapes are more likely to involve (1) strangers, (2) incidents which occur away from the victim's residence, and (3) incidents where the offender had no right to be at the scene. Whether an incident occurs during the night or day is irrelevant to the conflict model. And if there are political motives as well as sexual ones,<sup>5</sup> incidents are more likely to include more than one offender.

<sup>5</sup> Stember (1976) and Groth, Burgess, and Holmstrom (1977) argue that power and sexual gratification are closely linked for the male in consensual as well as nonconsensual sexual relations. Unfortunately, these data do not provide direct evidence of the offender's motives. Rather, the argument here is that normative and conflict models raise different expectations about the interpersonal context of interracial rape.

Finally, both models raise different expectations regarding the amount of violence likely to characterize the BW rape. Because the normative model conceptualizes BW rape as arising out of legitimate social interaction, use of a weapon and serious injury to the victim are less likely. In contrast, the conflict model conceptualizes BW rape as a violent attack on a sexual stratification system that is controlled by white males. Thus, use of a weapon and serious injury to the victim are more likely. Also, assuming that violence on the part of offenders is related to greater physical resistance on the part of victims,<sup>6</sup> the normative model predicts less, and the conflict model more, victim resistance.

Prior research has not provided an explanation for black-white differences in rates of interracial rape. Given the long history of racism in this country, ignoring such questions may seem defensible. However, I justify exploring these issues on two grounds. First, women, black and white, may be as much the victims of injustice in the operation of the criminal justice system as are black men. By assuming that high rates of BW rape are explained by false crime reports (e.g., Dollard 1957, p. 169), we are discriminating against white rape victims in the same way that we discriminate against black men when we ignore the effect of race on official reactions to rape. Second, by failing to consider differences in rates of rape between two major social groups, we may be delaying a theory that explains rape not in terms of the individual motives of rapists and victims but in terms of general relationships between men and women.

In this study, I present data from a national survey which includes characteristics of victims, offenders, and incidents. My specific purpose is to provide a tentative theory of interracial rape.

## DATA

### Sample

Data used here consist of 453 reports of rape and attempted rape derived from the National Crime Panel survey of crime victims, undertaken by the U.S. Bureau of the Census under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Justice. Because the methods and procedures used in these victimization surveys have been discussed in detail elsewhere (LEAA 1976, 1979), they are described only briefly here. In these surveys, representative samples of the U.S. population were asked to report on victimization

<sup>6</sup>The causal order between victim resistance and victim injury remains unclear (Bart and O'Brien 1980; Sanders 1980). But the correlations between victim resistance and injury in these data ( $r = .319$ ;  $p < .05$ ) show an important association between the two variables.

they suffered during the preceding six months. Data were collected from July 1973 through June 1977. The sample includes only female victims 12 years of age and older.<sup>7</sup>

### Variables

Table 2 shows the variables. The racial composition of the victim-defendant dyad is central to the theoretical concerns outlined above. But only 10 (2.2%) of the reports involved white offenders and black victims. The small number of these cases precluded meaningful analysis, and they were excluded from the sample. Variables relate to the normative and conflict models. These include measures of (1) victim's characteristics (age, education, marital status), (2) the interpersonal context of the crime (e.g., victim-defendant, relationship, since of offense), and (3) the amount of violence involved in the incident (e.g., weapon, physical injury). Most of these variables are straightforward and require little explanation. An exception is "defendant's right," which measures whether the defendant had the right to be at the scene of the offense either as a guest or workman.<sup>8</sup> In addition, I include "offense type," whether attempted or completed, and "theft," whether the incident included both theft and rape as control variables.

### RESULTS

I used multiple discriminant analysis (Cooley and Lohnes 1971) to determine the extent to which measures of victims' characteristics, the interpersonal context of incidents, and amount of violence discriminated among the three racial groups (i.e., BW, WW, and BB). This analysis shows (1) the number of functions necessary to explain the information in the criterion variables, (2) the direction of relationships between discriminating variables and racial groups, and (3) the relative importance of each variable for classifying observations into one of the three groups.

Table 3 shows the discriminant function coefficients, group centroids,

<sup>7</sup> Data for victims 14 years of age and older were based on victims' self-reports. Data for victims who were 12 and 13 years old were drawn from proxy respondents in victims' households (LEAA 1976).

<sup>8</sup> Having the right to be at the scene of the offense as a worker has somewhat different theoretical implications than being at the scene as a guest. Both categories were combined in the data and could not be separately analyzed. Nonetheless, the two models suggest different outcomes for this variable. The normative model emphasizes that increases in BW rape are related to increases in legitimate BW social interaction. Presumably this would include employer-worker relations. The conflict model makes no such claims.



TABLE 2  
VARIABLES AND SCALES

Variables and Scales	Distribution ( <i>N</i> = 443) (%)
Racial composition:	
1. Black defendant–white victim (BW) . . . . .	22.6
2. White intraracial (WW) . . . . .	61.4
3. Black intraracial (BB) . . . . .	16.0
Victim characteristics:	
Age:	
0. 21 or younger . . . . .	50.6
1. 22 or older . . . . .	49.4
Education:	
0. High school or less . . . . .	71.6
1. Some college or college graduate . . . . .	28.4
Marital status:	
0. Other . . . . .	77.0
1. Married . . . . .	23.0
Interpersonal context of the crime:	
Victim–defendant relationship:	
0. Acquaintances . . . . .	34.5
1. Strangers . . . . .	65.5
Scene of offense:	
0. Private residence . . . . .	46.0
1. Public location . . . . .	54.0
Time of offense:	
0. Other . . . . .	58.5
1. Victim outside residence at night . . . . .	41.5
Defendant’s right to be at scene:	
0. No right . . . . .	89.2
1. Had right . . . . .	10.8
Accomplice:	
0. No . . . . .	82.8
1. Yes . . . . .	17.2
Victim injury–defendant force:	
Weapon:	
0. No weapon . . . . .	76.3
1. Gun, knife, other . . . . .	23.7
Physical injury:	
0. None . . . . .	68.2
1. Wounds, bruises, cuts, etc. . . . .	31.8
Medical attention:	
0. Not required . . . . .	79.0
1. Required . . . . .	21.0
Victim resistance:	
0. No resistance or other resistance . . . . .	65.5
1. Physical resistance . . . . .	34.5
Control variables:	
Type of crime:	
0. Attempted . . . . .	67.7
1. Completed . . . . .	32.3
Theft:	
0. No . . . . .	87.6
1. Yes . . . . .	12.4

TABLE 3  
 DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION COEFFICIENTS, GROUP CENTROIDS, AND CANONICAL CORRELATIONS FOR BLACK DEFENDANT-WHITE VICTIM AND WHITE AND BLACK INTRARACIAL RAPES ( $N = 443$ )

Variable	Function 1	Function 2
Age.....	.028	.108
Education.....	-.071*	-.559
Marital status.....	-.076*	-.362
Victim-defendant relationship.....	.692*	-.395
Scene of offense.....	.801*	.124
Time of offense.....	-.830*	.323
Accomplices.....	.066	-.200
Defendant's right.....	-.067	-.211
Weapon.....	-.098*	.434
Victim injury.....	-.059	-.307
Medical.....	-.155	.083
Victim resistance.....	.128	.018
Type of crime.....	.127	.238
Theft.....	.424*	.305
Group centroids in reduced space:		
Black defendant-white victim..	.719	-.165
White intraracial.....	-.270	-.146
Black intraracial.....	.021	.791
Canonical correlation.....	.374	.328

\*Rao's  $V < .05$ .

and canonical correlations for black defendant-white victim, and white and black intraracial cases. The first discriminant function explained 57.48% of the variance in the means of the observations for each group.<sup>9</sup> I used Wilk's  $\lambda$  to determine whether this function was sufficient to pick up the information in the criterion variables (Kendall and Stuart 1966). Wilk's  $\lambda$  was .892 after the first function had been derived ( $\chi^2 = 49.26$ ;  $P < .0001$ ), showing that the second function is necessary and should be included (see also the canonical correlations for functions 1 and 2).<sup>10</sup>

The group centroids in table 3 are obtained by averaging the individual discriminant scores for all cases within each group (e.g., BW). A comparison of the group centroids tells us how far apart the groups are along each dimension (i.e., function). Thus, the first function in table 3 mainly differentiates black offender-white victim (BW) from other rapes.<sup>11</sup> The sec-

<sup>9</sup> In a three-group case, 100% of the variance in the means is explained by two root discriminant functions, orthogonal to each other.

<sup>10</sup> Note that  $\lambda$  is an inverse measure of the discriminating power in the original variables that has not yet been removed by the discriminant functions. Thus, the larger  $\lambda$  is, the less information remains.

<sup>11</sup> The functions are arranged in order of decreasing importance, so that a given difference between group centroids on the second function is less meaningful than the same difference for the first function.

ond function mainly differentiates black offender–black victim rapes (BB) from other rapes. The standardized discriminant function coefficients measure the relative contribution of each variable to each function.<sup>12</sup> Positive coefficients indicate that cases with high values for this function (as shown by the group centroids) are more likely to be characterized by these variables. For example, “scene of offense” in table 3 has a coefficient of .801 for function 1. This means that BW rapes were more likely than WW or BB rapes to involve women who were victimized outside their homes. Negative coefficients indicate that cases with high values for this function are less likely to be characterized by these variables. For example, education has a coefficient of  $-.559$  for function 2. This means that victims of BB rape were less likely than other victims to have some college or a college education.

According to table 3, black offender–white victim rapes were more likely to involve (1) public victimizations, (2) strangers,<sup>13</sup> and (3) incidents which included theft. For women raped outside their homes, BW rapes were less likely to occur at night. In contrast, black intraracial rapes were less likely to involve (1) victims with some college or a college degree, (2) strangers, and (3) married women. Black intraracial rapes were more likely to involve (1) victims attacked outside their residences at night, (2) use of weapons, and (3) theft. Victim’s age, presence or nonpresence of accomplices, the defendant’s right to be at the scene, victim injury, whether there was medical attention, victim resistance, and type of crime did not contribute to either function.

To assess the relative importance of each variable for classifying observations into one of the three groups, I included Rao’s (1952, p. 257)  $V$ , a generalized distance measure of dispersion.<sup>14</sup> Table 3 shows that seven

<sup>12</sup> The interpretation of the standardized discriminant function coefficients is analogous to the interpretation of  $\beta$  weights in multiple regression. Thus, in table 3, “scene of the offense” and “time of the offense” are about twice as important as “theft” for the first function.

<sup>13</sup> The theoretical consequences of differential reporting by victim-defendant relationship should not be minimized. For example, white women who voluntarily socialize with black men before a rape might be less willing to report rapes to authorities than white women victimized by black strangers. The National Crime Panel surveys reduced the possibility of such biases by preceding each interview with an earlier visit in which respondents were encouraged to recall their recent victimization experiences (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration 1972). Of course, the effectiveness of this strategy is unknown. Again, I justify using these data because they are the least susceptible to bias of any available sources (or any sources likely to be available in the future).

<sup>14</sup> Rao’s  $V$  evaluates each variable in terms of whether it increases discriminatory power. A variable which contains a large amount of information already included in previously selected variables may reduce discriminatory power by bringing the groups closer together. The change in  $V$  has a  $\chi^2$  distribution with one degree of freedom.

variables made significant contributions to classifying observations into one of the three groups. Other variables in table 3 were not very useful in discriminating among the groups. Table 4 shows the results of an analysis which included only the seven significant variables.

According to table 4, the canonical correlation was .366 for function 1 and .299 for function 2.<sup>15</sup> A comparison of the full and reduced equations shows that the seven variables included in table 4 are capable of classifying the observations in groups about as well as the full set of variables.

Results for the reduced variable set are similar to those obtained from the full set. The first function differentiates black offender–white victim rapes from other rapes. The second function differentiates black intraracial rapes from other rapes. Victim-defendant relationship and the time and location of the offense contribute most to classifying the first function. Victim education, weapon, and marital status contribute most to classifying the second function. Theft contributes to both functions. Rapes by black men were more likely than rapes by white men to include theft.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The normative and conflict models make different predictions about the importance of victims' characteristics and the interpersonal context and amount of violence in BW rapes. The normative model predicts that vic-

TABLE 4  
DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION COEFFICIENTS, GROUP CENTROIDS, AND CANONICAL CORRELATIONS FOR BLACK DEFENDANT-WHITE VICTIM AND WHITE AND BLACK INTRARACIAL RAPES ( $P < .05$ )

Variable	Function 1	Function 2
Education . . . . .	.037	.562
Marital status . . . . .	.057	.393
Victim-defendant relationship . . .	-.720	.347
Scene of offense . . . . .	-.827	-.236
Time of offense . . . . .	.843	-.268
Weapon . . . . .	.131	-.499
Theft . . . . .	-.429	-.387
Group centroids in reduced space:		
BW . . . . .	-.711	.118
WW . . . . .	.254	.143
BB . . . . .	.029	-.714
Canonical correlation . . . . .	.366	.299

<sup>15</sup> The canonical correlation is a measure of each function's ability to discriminate among groups. We can also interpret the canonical correlation squared as the proportion of variance in the discriminant function explained by the three groups.

tims of BW rape will be younger, more highly educated, and more likely to be single than other rape victims. Victims' characteristics are irrelevant for the conflict model. The results supported conflict predictions. The importance of age for classifying observations was similar for all three groups. That BW rapes were more likely than BB ones to involve victims with some college education and victims who were married is explained by the fact that black women generally have lower levels of education than white women and are less likely than white women to be married.<sup>16</sup> The importance of education and marital status was similar for white women, regardless of the offender's race. Thus, speculation that increases in BW rape rates may be due to the increasing liberalization of younger, college-educated women (e.g., Poussaint 1966; Nelson and Amir 1975; Curtis 1975) appears to be incorrect.

In terms of the interpersonal context of the incident, the normative model predicts that BW rapes develop from legitimate social interaction. The conflict model predicts no prior interaction. Three of the five interpersonal context measures supported the conflict model. Specifically, BW rapes were more likely to involve strangers and victims assaulted while away from their homes. They were also less likely than other rapes to occur at night. The three most important variables for classifying BW rapes, namely, victim-defendant relationship, scene of the offense, and time of the offense, all supported the conflict model. By contrast, none of the variables that were important for classifying BW cases supported the normative model.

The normative model assumes that BW rapes originate in prior legitimate social interaction between victim and offender. By contrast, the conflict model assumes that BW rapes represent violent attacks on a sexual stratification system dominated by white males. Thus, the normative model predicts less violence and the conflict model predicts more violence in BW cases. Neither model explained the results. Instead, I found no differences between racial groups with regard to physical injury, medical attention, or victim resistance. The only distinction between the cases lay in whether the offender was armed. Offenders in BB rapes were more likely than other offenders to be armed. A plausible explanation for this finding is simply that black offenders anticipate that the chances are greater of encountering an armed black woman than an armed white one. This explanation may be particularly important for rapes that occur in inner-city, high-

<sup>16</sup> Median years of school completed were 10.3 for black females and 12.2 years for white females in 1970 (United States Bureau of the Census 1975, p. 380). Of all black women, age 18–24, 21% were enrolled in colleges in 1975, compared with 24% of all white women for the same age group (United States Bureau of the Census 1979, p. 90). For 1970, 49% of all black women over 14 years of age were married, compared with 62% of all white females (United States Bureau of the Census 1979, p. 109).

crime areas, where many black women are routinely exposed to threats of violence (see Bordua and Lizotte 1979).

Taken together, the results suggest that the normative model must be rejected and the conflict model substantially modified. The conflict model begins with the assumption that sexual access, like other commodities that are both valued and scarce, is determined by power relations within a highly stratified sexual market. In America, this market has historically been controlled by white males. Conflict theorists (e.g., Hernton 1965; Poussaint 1966) and black leaders (e.g., Cleaver 1968; Jones 1966) have conceptualized BW rape as a violent political act associated with growing black anger at inequality and oppression. But the results do not fully support this interpretation. True, BW rapes were not characterized by any marked differences in victim attributes. And black men who raped white women tended to pick strangers, in public places, during the day. But BW rapes were no more violent than other rapes. Moreover, if the motive in these rapes was solely a desire to strike back at the sexual stratification system, it is unclear why black offenders, whether their victims were white or black, were more likely than white offenders to rob as well as to rape victims. Recent research by Stember (1976) may provide a partial explanation.

Stember claims that an important aspect of sexual stratification by race is the extent to which American society has promoted the belief that white women (or lighter-skinned black women) represent the ideal of sexual attractiveness. Stember and others (e.g., Fishman 1961; Hoetink 1967) argue that black men in white-dominated societies are widely influenced by this myth.<sup>17</sup> For men, both black and white, sexual gratification and power are closely related (e.g., Stember 1976; Groth et al. 1977). But because of a long history of sexual stratification by race in America, the meaning of interracial rape (and seduction) is different for black and white men. For some blacks, white women represent not only a highly stratified and repressive social system but also freedom, self-worth, and power (see Hernton 1965; Hippler 1974; Curtis 1975, p. 79). Thus, Poussaint (1972, pp. 95–96) argues that interracial contacts “may give a few black men a special feeling of worth and manhood.”

In sum, prior research clearly documents white fear of black sexuality with regard to white women (e.g., Myrdal 1944; Schulman 1974) and shows that compared with other racial combinations, black men who assault white women receive more serious official sanctions (e.g., Wolfgang and Riedel 1975; LaFree 1980). Results from empirical studies reviewed

<sup>17</sup> The myth of superior white female sexual desirability may also explain the greater frequency of BW than WB marriages (Heer 1974).

here strongly suggest that BW rapes are, in fact, more common than WB rapes and that this difference is not explained by differential reporting. The normative view that BW rapes are preceded by legitimate social interaction between black men who are more confident and white women who are more open to interaction with blacks cannot explain this difference. The conflict model is accurate in that the victim's characteristics were unrelated to racial composition and that BW rapes were not generally preceded by legitimate social interaction. But contrary to the conflict interpretation of BW rape as a violent political act, BW rapes were no more violent than other rapes. A more plausible explanation for the greater frequency of BW than WB rapes is that a white-dominated sexual stratification system has enshrined the white female as a symbol of sexual attractiveness, freedom, and power. The major difference between BW rapes and other rapes is less political than strategic: because the social system continues to separate black men from white women, offenders in BW cases select victims with whom they have had no prior social contact.

The failure of social science to evaluate critically issues of race and sex, while perhaps motivated by good intentions, has delayed the development of theoretical explanations for interracial sexual behavior. Longitudinal data on the characteristics of victims and offenders would help resolve the issues raised here. Further research on the motivations of rapists might also be relevant (see Fisher and Rivlin 1971). Although this analysis was limited to contemporary America, the implied relationships would apply to all societies which include a sexually segregated underclass (see Daniel 1968; Welsh 1969; Inglis 1974). More generally, relationships between rape and power may be relevant to other male power struggles (e.g., Rangan 1974; Scacco 1975).

If we assume that America is characterized by race-specific rules of sexual access, then white fear about the rape of white women by black men and the greater frequency of BW than WB rape become two different aspects of the same phenomenon. White males set this sexual stratification system in place by promoting the white female as the standard of sexual desirability. White men have attempted to maintain this system by illegal violence against black men (e.g., Inverarity 1976) and by differential application of the law (e.g., Wolfgang and Riedel 1975; LaFree 1980). For their part, black men have been influenced by white definitions of sexual attractiveness (Fishman 1961; Cavior and Howard 1973). The empirical evidence shows that BW rapes are more common despite harsh punishments for the sexual violation of white women. Fundamentally, the struggle between black and white males represents an age-old conflict where men from dominant groups attempt to protect their sexual property from

subordinate-group men, while simultaneously ignoring the victimization of subordinate-group women. Women, black and white, have historically been the victims of this struggle.

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