The Racial Patterning of Rape*

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Abstract

Using data on 1,396 rapes reported in the National Crime Survey, we examine various explanations for interracial (black offender–white victim) rape. We find little support for the hypothesis, derived from conflict theory, that interracial rape reflects black economic deprivation and politicalization. Interracial, as opposed to intraracial, rapes were no more frequent in cities with high black poverty, unemployment, or racial inequality. Nor does interracial rape appear to result from blacks' limited sexual access to white women; we do not find the expected relationship between a city's interracial marriage rate and the racial composition of rape. Rather, in support of Blau's macrostructural theory, the racial patterning of rape is most strongly influenced by opportunities for interpersonal contact between whites and blacks. Both the racial composition of a city, representing the pool of rape victims or offenders of a particular race, and the degree of black-white residential segregation emerged as significant predictors of the racial patterning of rape. Finally, we find no evidence that black rapists, given equivalent opportunities to rape a white or a black woman, prefer white victims. In fact, during the course of robberies involving strangers, black men are slightly more likely to rape a black woman than a white woman.

Motives to rape are undoubtedly complex. Some discussions view rape as an expression of dominance and hostility toward women (Brownmiller 1975; Deming & Eppy 1981; Groth 1979; Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1983), while others suggest that sexual motivation is also important (Felson & Krohn 1990; Scully & Marolla 1985). However, one type of rape — that committed by black men against white women — has been attributed to a unique motive. Following Eldridge Cleaver's depiction of interracial rape as an insurrectionary act (Cleaver 1968), several observers have suggested that black-on-white rapes stem from blacks' enmity toward whites, and that black-on-white rape is a calculated response by blacks to their economic and political oppression by white men (Curtis 1975, 1976; LaFree 1982; Wilbanks 1985). The rape of a white woman by a black man is seen as "the penultimate way for a black man to serve up

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revenge on his white male oppressor" (Curtis 1975:78-79). From this view, the source of blacks' motivations to rape white women lies in their economic deprivation vis-à-vis whites (Curtis 1975, 1976).

Recently, however, this conflict perspective on interracial rape has been called into question. O'Brien (1987) disputes the idea that black rapists have a special preference for white victims, and shows that rape, like other violent crimes, is more *intra*racial than expected given the racial distributions of victims and offenders (see also Sampson 1984). Drawing on Blau's (1977) theory of social structure, O'Brien (1987) argues that the greater frequency of black offender–white victim rapes in comparison to white offender–black victim rapes can be explained by differential opportunities for interracial contact, opportunities that stem from differences in the sizes of the black and white populations as well as their proximity in physical space. This "macrostructural opportunity" perspective on interracial rape posits no special predilection by black rapists for white victims, but rather hypothesizes that the frequency of black-white rape will be related to the characteristics of the urban social structure that impede or facilitate interracial interaction.

The purpose of this article is to assess the relative merits of these and other perspectives on the racial patterning of rape. Using data on 1,396 rapes reported in the National Crime Survey's (NCS) Cities Sample, we examine how the racial composition of rape (i.e., the specific race-of-victim/race-of-offender combination) is related to characteristics of the victim, of the offender(s), and of the city in which the rape occurred. Importantly, prior research has focused exclusively on either individual-level determinants of the racial composition of rape (Agopian, Chappell & Geis 1977; Amir 1971; LaFree 1982) or aggregate-level determinants of interracial rape rates (South & Messner 1986). In contrast, our use of contextual analysis allows us to incorporate relevant variables at both the individual and aggregate levels and, thus, to test models couched at the different levels. The four models of the racial patterning of rape we examine here involve black deprivation and politicalization, black men's sexual access to white women, macrostructural opportunity, and the attributes of victims that promote interracial social interaction.

Theoretical Explanations for Interracial Rape

BLACK DEPRIVATION AND POLITICALIZATION

Although the proposition that black men rape white women to avenge racism and discrimination has been suggested frequently (e.g., Brownmiller 1975; Hernton 1966; LaFree 1982; Weiss & Borges 1973; Wilbanks 1985), the theory has been developed most systematically by Curtis (1975, 1976). Curtis sees the roots of black-on-white rape in the structured economic inequalities between blacks and whites. Rampant poverty and unemployment among young black males generates a violent contraculture that often finds expression in personal crime (Curtis 1976:121-23). When combined with increasing black identity and power, these contracultural values lead blacks to strike out at the perceived source of their economic deprivation, viz., whites. Thus, both the frustrations of economic

marginality and rising black politicalization contribute to sexual attacks on white females.

LaFree (1982) examines the conflict model in an analysis of 443 rapes reported to the NCS. LaFree finds that, in comparison with *intra*racial (i.e., black-on-black and white-on-white) rapes, black-on-white rapes are more likely to: 1) involve strangers, 2) occur away from the victim's home, and 3) occur at night. Because, according to LaFree, the conflict model predicts no prior interaction between victims and offenders, he argues that these differences in the interpersonal context of rape support the conflict approach.

Whether LaFree's results actually support the conflict model is open to question. Two of his findings, he acknowledges, contradict the conflict model. First, he finds that black-on-white rapes are no more likely than intraracial rapes to involve physical violence or the use of weapons (see also Felson & Krohn 1990). If such rapes reflect the enmity of blacks for whites, one would expect a greater level of violence on the part of black offenders. Second, he finds no difference between single offenders and multiple offenders (i.e., pair or gang rapes) in their propensity to engage in interracial rape. If interracial rapes reflect enmity between groups then one would expect more attacks against the out-group in rapes involving multiple offenders (Curtis 1976). In other words, one would expect that persons are more likely to engage in violence against members of out-groups when in-group members are present. Supportive evidence comes from experimental research that indicates that conflict is more severe when groups are involved (Stephenson & Brotherton 1975; Wilson & Kayatani 1968; Wilson & Wong 1968).

Moreover, the results that LaFree interprets in terms of the conflict model are open to alternative interpretations. One such alternative, drawn from the routine activities approach (Cohen & Felson 1979; Miethe, Stafford & Long 1987), might argue that because a considerable proportion of all black male–white female encounters involve strangers and locations outside the woman's home, it follows that a disproportionate number of interracial rapes will have these characteristics. That is, given the strong tendency for friends and acquaintances to be of the same race, most interactions of all types between black males and white females will involve strangers, at least in comparison to interactions between white males and females and between black males and females. It is possible that LaFree's findings simply reflect features common to all black male–white female encounters, and not the unique characteristics of interracial rape.

A different and, in some ways, more straightforward test of the conflict perspective is to directly assess the effect of economic deprivation among black subgroups on the racial patterning of rape. If the source of blacks' proclivity to rape whites lies in their economic deprivation and politicalization, as Curtis (1975, 1976) suggests, then blacks residing in urban communities characterized by high levels of black poverty, unemployment, and inequality should demonstrate a pronounced preference for white victims. The frustrations accompanying racism and discrimination will foment racial hostility among black men, with white women their targets of aggression (Curtis 1976). Conversely, communities characterized by lesser degrees of black deprivation are expected to show comparatively low rates of interracial rape.

SEXUAL ACCESS

One variant of the conflict model, incorporated into the arguments of Curtis (1975, 1976), LaFree (1982), and others (Brownmiller 1975; Hernton 1966; Poussaint 1972; Stember 1976), views black-on-white rape as a response not so much to blacks' economic deprivation, but to their lack of legitimate sexual access to white women. According to this perspective, "American society has promoted the belief that white women represent the ideal of sexual attractiveness" (LaFree 1982:324). This belief is promulgated by white men but shared by many blacks. White males, however, exercise their dominant position in society to limit legitimate sexual interactions between black men and white women. Differential access to white women is thus a part of a larger system of stratification in which access to desired rewards and resources is allocated unequally by race.

Prior discussions of the sexual access model implicitly assume that black men's sexual access to white women through accepted social interaction (e.g., dating, courtship, marriage) is constant. Black men throughout the U.S. are thought to face the same barriers to interacting with white women. However, recent research demonstrating considerable intermetropolitan variation in one form of legitimate black-white sexual interaction — racial intermarriage — casts doubt on this assumption (Blau, Blum & Schwartz 1982; Blau & Schwartz 1984; Blum 1984). Apparently, the degree to which black men have sexual access to white women through marriage varies across cities, thereby allowing a test of the proposition that limited sexual access to white women increases the frequency of black-on-white rape. The specific hypothesis tested here is that black men in cities characterized by high interracial marriage rates (and, presumably, greater opportunities for licit sexual contacts with white women both in and out of marriage) are less likely to rape white women than black men in cities where interracial marriage is less frequent.

MACROSTRUCTURAL OPPORTUNITY

Both the black deprivation/politicalization and sexual access models imply a preference for white victims on the part of black rapists. Because of black rage and/or the alleged sexual attractiveness of white females, black rapists are believed to seek out white women as victims. O'Brien's (1987) recent analysis of NCS data on interracial violent crime disputes this claim. O'Brien demonstrates that, given the marginal distributions of victims' and offenders' races, as well as the different sizes of black and white populations, violent crimes, including rape, are actually more intraracial than statistically expected.

Drawing on Blau's (1977) macrostructural theory, O'Brien suggests two influences on the racial composition of rape: the relative sizes of the black and white populations (O'Brien 1987:819-20) and their degree of segregation in physical space (1982:832-33). These dimensions of social structure are salient for patterns of interracial rape because they condition the opportunities for blacks and whites to interact. More specifically, group size is important because it affects the probability that a potential white victim will come into contact with a potential black rapist. From a white victim's perspective, the probability of

being raped by a black rather than a white should be positively associated with the size of the pool of potential black offenders. Analogously, from the offender's perspective, the choice of a victim of a particular race will be influenced by the numerical representation of women of that race in the population. Racial segregation in physical space, because it constrains opportunities for interracial contact (Blau 1977:90-93), serves to reduce the relative probabilities of interracial rape, while simultaneously increasing the probabilities of intraracial rape. In contrast to the black deprivation and sexual access models, this macrostructural opportunity perspective on interracial rape assumes no special proclivity for blacks to victimize whites, but rather sees the racial patterning of rape as primarily a function of the structural arrangements that facilitate or impede interracial contacts.

With few exceptions, prior applications of Blau's theory to patterns of interracial violent crime have supported its propositions (Messner & South 1986; Sampson 1984, 1986; South & Messner 1986). Sampson (1984) reports significant effects of racial composition on interracial crime rates for a sample of neighborhood clusters, and Messner and South (1986) and South and Messner (1986) report significant influences of both racial composition and residential segregation on interracial crime rates for a sample of 25 cities. However, none of these studies focuses exclusively on rape, and therefore none tests macrostructural opportunity theory against alternative models. Moreover, because these studies rely entirely on aggregate data, they are unable to incorporate characteristics of the victim and the offender (other than race) into the analysis.

Our analysis also goes beyond O'Brien's (1987) study in two significant ways. First, because O'Brien relies exclusively on national-level data, he is unable to examine why the racial composition of rape varies across social and economic contexts. It is possible that, although rape is more intraracial than statistically expected, interurban variation in the degree to which black offenders choose white victims is nonetheless responsive to black economic deprivation and/or lack of sexual access. That is, the fact that rape tends to be intraracial does not rule out the possibility that other variables can explain variance in it. Second, O'Brien's analysis demonstrates that, once the racial distributions of the population are taken into account, there is no evidence that black offenders disproportionately select white victims. However, in order to assess the behavioral preferences of black and white rapists with respect to the races of their victims — a key concern in this area — it is necessary to compare situations in which the opportunities to rape a woman of either race are truly equivalent. In a later section, we examine these preferences of black and white rapists by focusing on incidents in which actual contact with potential white and black victims has been established.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

The social interaction perspective (Curtis 1976; LaFree 1982) is concerned with the characteristics of potential rape victims, especially as these influence white women's exposure to black men. Black-on-white rapes are seen as an inevitable consequence of increased social interaction between white women and black men. Like the macrostructural approach, this perspective emphasizes variables

that increase or decrease black-white contacts. But, unlike macrostructural theory, the social interaction model focuses on the effect of the victim's characteristics and attitudes on opportunities for interracial interaction rather than on macrolevel aspects of social structure.

Three attributes of a white woman thought to increase her willingness to interact with black men are her age, marital status, and education (Curtis 1974; LaFree 1982). Young, single, and highly educated white women are believed to hold more liberal attitudes toward blacks, to engage more frequently in legitimate social interactions with blacks, and, thus, to incur greater risk of rape victimization at the hands of black men. Although LaFree (1982) reports little support for this perspective, we reassess this model here with a larger sample size and a contextual research design that controls for other possible determinants of the racial composition of rape.

POINTS OF CONTRAST

These models of interracial rape diverge in at least three ways. First, they predict that different variables will distinguish black-on-white rapes from other racial combinations. The black deprivation/politicalization model emphasizes economic inequality and poverty among blacks and differences between group and individual offenders. The sexual access model implies inverse effects of interracial marriage opportunities. The macrostructural opportunity model underscores the role of racial composition and racial segregation as factors influencing the relative frequency of black-on-white rapes, while the social interaction perspective stresses the sociodemographic characteristics of victims.

Second, for the effect of some variables, these models make contradictory predictions. For example, the black deprivation thesis might suggest that residential segregation by race, insofar as it reflects restricted social and economic chances for blacks (Logan & Messner 1987), will lead to frequent black-on-white rapes. Macrostructural opportunity theory, in contrast, anticipates a negative relationship between racial residential segregation and interracial rape. Similarly, the black deprivation model suggests that racial economic inequality in the community will breed black hostility and more frequent black-on-white rapes, while Blau's theory (and, to some extent, the social interaction model) suggests that racial income inequality reduces the frequency of black-on-white rapes because it limits opportunities for interracial contact (Blau 1977:101-25; South & Messner 1986). Finally, the sexual access model implies that interracial marriage rates, signifying heightened probabilities of legitimate sexual relations between blacks and whites, will lessen the frequency of black-on-white rapes. A contrasting expectation derived from macrostructural opportunity theory is that rates of interracial marriage and interracial rape will be positively related because both types of interracial interaction depend upon the social structural parameters that facilitate intergroup associations (South & Messner 1986).

Finally, the models disagree on whether black offenders will show a preference for white victims. The conflict model, whether it focuses on deprivation or sexual access, suggests that black offenders will, *given equivalent opportunities*, prefer white victims to black victims. Thus, the conflict model

would predict that during the course of a robbery, when the opportunity for rape exists, a black man is more likely to rape the victim if she is white than if she is black. On the other hand, the macrostructural and social interaction models posit either no preference or an in-group preference (if the homogamy principle operates) on the part of offenders.

Data and Methods

The primary source of data for this analysis is the NCS Cities Sample (U.S. Department of Justice 1978). Conducted between 1972 and 1975, the NCS interviewed the residents of approximately 10,000 households in each of 26 cities. (Thirteen cities were surveyed twice; respondents from both surveys are included in our analysis.) Each household member age twelve and over was asked to list all criminal victimizations experienced in the preceding twelve months. Information was collected on various characteristics of the victim, the criminal incident, and, for those crimes involving face-to-face contact with the offender, certain characteristics, including race, of the offender. The NCS Cities Sample is perfectly suited to our needs because, unlike the NCS national surveys, we can examine simultaneously the impact on the racial composition of rape of both individual characteristics and structural conditions of the city in which the rape occurred.

Of course, the NCS data on rape are not without problems. They share with NCS data on other crimes the potential for under- and overreporting (Levine 1976), and the definition of rape used by the NCS is rather broad (Warr n.d.). The ability of the NCS to measure rapes between nonstrangers has also been questioned (Warr n.d.). However, these problems are most relevant for assessing the overall frequency of rape; they would seem to be less relevant for examining factors that influence the racial distribution of criminal incidents similarly classified as rape. Moreover, not only are these the best available data for studying the racial patterning of rape (LaFree 1982), but their use here maintains continuity with prior research on which this article builds (LaFree 1982; O'Brien, 1987).

Our sample of 1,396 rapes includes only those involving a female victim and a male offender. We exclude cases in which the offender was white and the victim was black; only 20 rapes, after adjusting for missing data, fit this description. We also exclude cases in which either the offender or the victim was from another race (i.e., neither black nor white). For rapes involving multiple offenders, we exclude cases in which the offenders were of different races. In these rapes, an unambiguous classification of each offender's race is not possible. Because prior research shows that the race of neither the victim nor the offender differentiates an attempted from a completed rape (Lizotte 1986), we include both in our analysis.[1] Table 1 shows the distribution of rapes across the three race-of-victim/race-of-offender categories.

Descriptive statistics for the independent variables are also shown in Table 1. Four of these represent characteristics of victims: age, marital status, education, and employment status at the time of the incident.[2] Three of the

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics for Individual-Level and Contextual Variables

Racial composition	%	N
Black offender–white victim	23.06	322
White offender–white victim	44.20	617
Black offender–black victim	32.74	457

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Victim characteristics		
Age (in years)	24.92	11.26
Marital status (0=married; 1=not married)	.79	.41
Education (in years)	11.75	2.91
Employment status (0=not employed; 1=employed)	.46	.50
Offender characteristics		
Age of offender(s) (0=< 21; 1=≥ 21)	.76	.43
Number of offenders (0=one; 1=more than one)	.12	.33
Relationship to victim (0=stranger; 1=nonstranger)	.33	.47
Black deprivation and politicalization		
Black poverty rate	27.17	3.81
Black male unemployment rate	7.57	2.45
Black-white income inequality	1.48	.17
Number of civil disorders, 1968-1969	14.95	16.86
Sexual access to whites		
Nonwhite out-marriage rate	.10	.16
Macrostructural opportunity		
Percent black	28.31	16.59
Percent white	69.80	16.00
Racial residential segregation	86.65	5.87

(N=1,396)

variables are based on victims' reports about offenders: the number of offenders, their ages,[3] and their relationship to the victim.[4]

The other independent variables are all characteristics of the city in which the rape victim resides. With one exception (discussed below), all of these variables are derived from 1970 Census data. While this strategy unavoidably creates a temporal mismatch between the independent variables (measured in 1969 and 1970) and the dependent variables (measured between 1972 and 1975), the problem is likely to be minimal given the stability of income and population distributions over short periods of time.

Three of these contextual variables measure the degree to which blacks suffer economic deprivation: the black poverty rate (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1972:Table 95), the black male unemployment rate (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1972:Table 92), and the ratio of white to black median family incomes (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1973). A fourth variable, the number of race-related civil

disorders that occurred in 1968-1969 (Lemberg Center 1968-1970), is intended to gauge the extent to which the black community was politicized at that time.[5] Racial disturbances indicate a willingness among blacks in a city to act on their grievances, even though the sources of those grievances may have been shared by all communities (e.g., Spilerman 1970).

Our indicator of blacks' legitimate sexual access to whites is the nonwhite out-marriage rate computed and analyzed by Blau, Blum, and Schwartz (1982; see also Blau & Schwartz 1984; Blau, Beeker & Fitzpatrick 1984; Blum 1984).[6] Constructed from the 1% public use sample from the 1970 Census, the nonwhite out-marriage rate is the proportion of married nonwhites with white spouses.[7] While in all likelihood this measure is the best currently available, two potential problems with its use in this context should be acknowledged. First, the nonwhite out-marriage rate employs a white/nonwhite dichotomy, whereas the rape data are based on a white/black distinction. Second, the out-marriage rate is available only for SMSAs, while the NCS data pertain to central cities.[8] However, given that nonwhites are overwhelmingly black, and that blacks tend to be concentrated in central cities of SMSAs, we doubt these discrepancies introduce inordinate error into the analysis.

The two variables representing the macrostructural opportunity perspective are the racial composition of a city, either percent black or percent white depending on whether the victim's or the offender's perspective is taken (see below), and an index of racial residential segregation. The racial composition variables are taken from the U.S. Census (1972:Table 23). The measure of racial residential segregation is the index of dissimilarity computed from block-level data by Sørensen, Taeuber, and Hollingsworth (1975).

We analyze the data from two perspectives. First, we show how the independent variables affect the probability that a white rape victim was raped by a black rather than a white offender. Thus, this first perspective compares black-on-white rapes with white-on-white rapes. We then take the perspective of the black rape offender, and determine how the independent variables influence his choice of a white rather than a black victim. This latter perspective contrasts black-on-white rapes with black intraracial rapes.

The only difference in the independent variables between these two perspectives involves racial composition. When taking the victim's perspective, the percentage of the city's population that is black is the appropriate measure of racial composition because it gauges the probability that a white woman will encounter a black man. When taking the offender's perspective, we use the percentage of the city's population that is white because it represents the relative size of the pool of potential white victims. Because our dependent variables are dichotomous and our independent variables are both categorical and continuous, we employ logistic regression analysis (Aldrich & Nelson 1984; Hanushek & Jackson 1977).[9]

Results

Table 2 presents the logistic equations that adopt the victim's perspective.[10] In the first equation, the log odds of a white female rape victim being raped by a

TABLE 2: Determinants of the Probability that a White Female Rape Victim Is Victimized by a Black Rather than a White Offender[a]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Victim characteristics				
Age	.020**	.020**	.018**	.019**
	(.006)	(.006)	(.007)	(.007)
Marital status	.090	.114	.120	.115
(0=married; 1=not married)	(.175)	(.177)	(.178)	(.179)
Education	.115**	.116**	.120**	.116**
	(.029)	(.029)	(.030)	(.030)
Employment status	-.231	-.238	-.222	-.229
(0=not employed; 1=employed)	(.158)	(.160)	(.161)	(.162)
Offender characteristics				
Age of offender(s)	-.627**	-.617**	-.642**	-.638**
(0=<21; 1=≥21)	(.175)	(.178)	(.179)	(.180)
Number of offenders	.513*	.498*	.466*	.472*
(0=one; 1=more than one)	(.227)	(.230)	(.231)	(.232)
Relationship to victim	-.804**	-.832**	-.809**	-.821**
(0=stranger; 1=nonstranger)	(.173)	(.176)	(.177)	(.179)
Black deprivation and politicalization				
Black poverty rate		-.018		-.028
		(.027)		(.028)
Black male unemployment rate		.045		.001
		(.037)		(.039)
Black-white income inequality		.461		.799
		(.599)		(.628)
Number of civil disorders, 1968-1969		.000		.000
		(.005)		(.005)
Sexual access to whites				
Nonwhite out-marriage rate		-1.702**		-.392
		(.533)		(.662)
Macrostructural opportunity				
Percent black			.022**	.020**
			(.005)	(.006)
Racial residential segregation			-.036**	-.040**
			(.013)	(.014)
Constant	-1.914**	-2.277**	.622**	.739**
df	931	926	929	924
R^{2} [b]	.083	.094	.112	.115

* p<.05 (two-tailed test)   ** p<.01 (two-tailed test)

[a] Maximum likelihood logistic regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
[b] R^2 from OLS regression equation

black rather than a white offender is regressed on the characteristics of the victim and the offender(s). The social interaction model of interracial rape, which predicts that young, single, and highly educated women are more likely than other women to be raped by a black than a white, receives mixed support. As predicted, education increases the probability of being raped by a black. But contrary to the social interaction model, the victim's age is positively associated with that probability, while the effect of marital status is not statistically significant. In addition, whether the victim was employed is unrelated to the race of her assailant. Consistent with the conflict model, black-on-white rapes are more likely than white-on-white rapes to be committed by multiple offenders. Interracial rapes are also more likely to involve young offenders and offenders who were strangers to the victim.

The equation in column 2 of Table 2 adds the contextual independent variables important to the black deprivation/politicalization and sexual access models. None of the coefficients for the first set of contextual variables is statistically significant. There is no evidence that white women face a greater risk of being victimized by black rapists in cities where blacks are disproportionately economically disadvantaged or where they have engaged in political violence.

Consistent with the sexual access model, it appears at first glance that white women are significantly more likely to be raped by black men in cities where blacks have little opportunity to engage in legitimate sexual interaction, through marriage, with whites. Before placing much confidence in this finding, however, it is necessary to control for urban social structural characteristics that could conceivably influence the probabilities of both interracial rape and interracial marriage. Significant relationships between the macrostructural opportunity variables and rates of interracial marriage have been established by earlier research (Blau et al. 1982, 1984; Blum 1984).

The third equation in Table 2 includes, in lieu of the economic deprivation variables and the nonwhite out-marriage rate, the two variables implied by the macrostructural opportunity model, percent black and the index of racial residential segregation. The effects of both variables are strong and statistically significant. Living in a city with a relatively large black population increases the probability that a white woman will be raped by a black rather than a white offender. For example, compared to a woman in a city that is 10% black (e.g., Denver or Milwaukee), a woman in a city that is 50% black (e.g., Atlanta or Baltimore) is 2.4 times (= $e^{[.022][50-10]}$) more likely to be raped by a black rather than a white.

Net of other variables, living in a city that is highly segregated by race reduces the probability of being raped by a black. Compared to a woman living in a mildly segregated city (e.g., Oakland with an index of dissimilarity of 70.4), a woman living in a highly segregated city (e.g., Chicago with an index of 93.0) is less than half as likely to be raped by a black ($e^{[-.036][93.0-70.4]}$ = .44). These effects are consistent with macrostructural opportunity theory; a large black population increases the probability that a white woman will encounter a black, while high levels of segregation impede interracial contact. In turn, opportunities for interracial contact largely determine opportunities for, and the occurrence of, interracial rape.

TABLE 3: Determinants of the Probability that a Black Male Rape Offender Victimizes a White Rather than a Black Female[a]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Victim characteristics				
Age	.011	.013	.013	.014
	(.007)	(.008)	(.008)	(.008)
Marital status	-.174	-.093	-.214	-.142
(0=married; 1=not married)	(.202)	(.217)	(.214)	(.221)
Education	.282**	.256**	.230**	.237**
	(.038)	(.040)	(.039)	(.040)
Employment status	.427*	.524**	.598**	.599**
(0=not employed; 1=employed)	(.179)	(.193)	(.193)	(.198)
Offender characteristics				
Age of offender(s)	-.496*	-.575**	-.467*	-.493*
(0=<21; 1=≥21)	(.193)	(.206)	(.205)	(.210)
Number of offenders	.311	.380	.382	.410
(0=one; 1=more than one)	(.241)	(.255)	(.254)	(.259)
Relationship to victim	-.951**	-1.104**	-1.127**	-1.183**
(0=stranger; 1=nonstranger)	(.188)	(.204)	(.201)	(.207)
Black deprivation and politicalization				
Black poverty rate		.040		.017
		(.026)		(.028)
Black male unemployment rate		.044		.022
		(.045)		(.051)
Black-white income inequality		-.775		-.362
		(.616)		(.655)
Number of civil disorders, 1968-1969		-.012*		-.014**
		(.005)		(.005)
Sexual access to whites				
Nonwhite out-marriage rate		6.719**		3.124*
		(1.335)		(1.322)
Macrostructural opportunity				
Percent white			.053**	.036**
			(.006)	(.008)
Racial residential segregation			-.053**	-.027
			(.014)	(.018)
Constant	-3.396**	-3.581**	-1.703**	-3.041**
df	771	766	769	764
R^{2} [b]	.187	.273	.274	.295

* $p<.05$ (two-tailed test) ** $p<.01$ (two-tailed test)

[a] Maximum likelihood logistic regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
[b] R^2 from OLS regression equation

Column 4 shows the full equation with all of the independent variables. The one significant change from prior equations is that, once the macrostructural opportunity variables are controlled, the relationship between the nonwhite out-marriage rate and the probability of a white victim being raped by a black is no longer significant. Apparently, the initially observed relationship was spurious, with both interracial rape and interracial marriage being influenced by the opportunities for interracial associations. When two of the variables that determine those contact opportunities are held constant, no causal relationship between interracial rape and interracial marriage is evident. In sum, from the white victim's perspective on interracial rape, we find only slight support for the social interaction model and the black deprivation/politicalization model, no support for the sexual access model, but clear support for the macrostructural opportunity model.

In Table 3, we assess the relative merits of these perspectives from the rape offender's standpoint. Here we examine the factors that affect the probability that a black rape offender will choose a white rather than a black victim. That is, we focus on variables that distinguish black-on-white from black-on-black rapes.

The equation in column 1 shows that, compared to black victims of black rapists, white victims of black rapists have more years of schooling and are more likely to be employed. As LaFree (1982) suggests, this effect of education probably reflects gross differences in the educational attainments of black and white women. Neither the age nor the marital status of the victim differentiates black-on-white from black-on-black rapes.

With respect to the characteristics of black offenders, older rapists and rapists who know the victim are significantly less likely to rape a white woman than a black woman. Compared to younger offenders, black rapists over the age of 20 are only 61% as likely to rape a white woman than a black woman. Black-on-white rapes are only 39% as likely as black-on-black rapes to involve a victim and offender who previously knew each other. However, while the relationship is in the predicted direction, rapes involving multiple offenders are not significantly more likely to be interracial.

Equation 2 of Table 3 adds the black deprivation/politicalization variables and the nonwhite out-marriage rate as independent variables. Although the coefficients for two of these variables are statistically significant, neither effect is in the predicted direction. Contrary to the black politicalization model, a black rapist is less, rather than more, likely to choose a white victim in cities that have experienced a large number of racial disturbances. And contrary to the sexual access model, a black rapist is more, rather than less, likely to select a white victim in cities where interracial marriage is relatively common. This latter effect is more consistent with the structural argument that rates of cordial intergroup relations (e.g., interracial marriage) and conflictual intergroup encounters (e.g., interracial rape) will be positively correlated because both forms of association are dependent on opportunities for intergroup contact (South & Messner 1986).

The equation in column 3 substitutes for the black deprivation and sexual access variables the two variables important to macrostructural opportunity theory — the percent of the city's population that is white and the index of

residential segregation. As was the case from the victim's perspective, the effects of both variables are strong and statistically significant. A large pool of potential white victims increases the probability that a black rapist will choose a white victim, while the segregation of blacks and whites in physical space decreases that same probability. To illustrate, compared to a black rapist in a city that is 50% white (e.g., New Orleans, Detroit), a black rapist in a city that is 90% white (e.g., San Diego, Portland) is over eight times as likely ($e^{[.053][90-50]} = 8.33$) to choose a white rather than a black victim. Further, compared to a black rapist in a mildly segregated city such as San Francisco (with an index of dissimilarity of 75.0), a rapist in a highly segregated city such as Dallas (with an index of 95.9) is only one third as likely ($e^{[-.053][95.9-75.0]} = .33$) to victimize a white woman.

The last equation in Table 3 includes all of the independent variables. While most of the coefficients retain their size and significance, the effects of the nonwhite out-marriage rate, percent white, and racial segregation are all attenuated. In fact, the coefficient for the segregation index drops to statistical nonsignificance (although still one and a half times its standard error). We suspect that the interracial marriage rate, along with racial composition and segregation, shares some of the effect of interracial contact opportunities. High rates of interracial marriage are probably indicative of not only black-white contacts spawned by a large white population and low segregation, but also the potential for interracial contacts not captured by these variables, such as contacts in places of work and recreation areas. Thus, the nonwhite out-marriage rate has an independent, positive association with the probability that a black rapist will choose a white victim.

STRANGERS VERSUS NONSTRANGERS

In additional analyses, we explored whether the determinants of the racial composition of rape varied according to the relationship between the victim and the offender. Several of the models considered here could apply differently to stranger rapes than to nonstranger rapes. For example, one might expect the effect of multiple offenders on interracial rape to be stronger in rapes involving strangers. Any tendency to attack members of an out-group may be attenuated if offenders know the victim. In addition, opportunities for interracial contact could affect the racial composition of either stranger rape or nonstranger rape, or both, depending upon the mechanisms involved. On the one hand, these opportunities could directly affect the likelihood of interracial rape by increasing fortuitous contacts between strangers of different races. On the other hand, opportunities for interracial interaction could also increase interracial friendships and acquaintances, and therefore increase the number of interracial rapes among people who know each other. Finally, the social interaction model would predict that social-demographic characteristics of the victim have a greater effect on the racial composition of rapes involving people who know each other. If less prejudiced white women are more likely to be raped by blacks because they interact with blacks, then that victimization should be more likely to involve offenders whom they know.

We found four statistically significant interactions between an independent variable and the relationship of victim to offender. In each case, the variable in

question is more closely associated with the racial composition of stranger rapes than with that of nonstranger rapes.[11]

First, there was a significant interaction involving whether the offender(s) were strangers and whether there were multiple offenders in analyses based on the offender's perspective. For stranger rapes, multiple black offenders are more likely than lone black offenders to rape whites than blacks. Among nonstranger rapes, multiple and single offenders do not differ in their choice of victim. Thus, when attention is confined to stranger rapes, we again find some evidence for the conflict hypothesis that black rapists acting in groups disproportionately select white victims.

Second, from the victim's perspective, the racial composition of the community is a significantly better predictor of the racial composition of rapes among strangers than among nonstrangers. The percentage of the city's population that is black helps to differentiate black-on-white from white-on-white stranger rapes, but not black-on-white from white-on-white nonstranger rapes. This finding is more consistent with the idea that interracial contact produces opportunity for interracial rape because it results in chance meetings of black and white strangers.

Finally, interactions between victim-offender relationship and victim's education were observed in analyses from both the victim's and the offender's perspective. Rapes involving strangers are more likely to be interracial if the victim is educated, but this relationship was not observed for nonstranger rapes. This finding does not support the social interaction model, which would predict a stronger relationship among nonstrangers.

Do Black Rapists Prefer White Victims?

As noted earlier, the conflict models of interracial rape seem to imply that black rapists have a special proclivity to attack white women, both relative to their desire to attack black women and to the rate at which white rapists attack black women (O'Brien 1987). Unfortunately, evaluating these arguments regarding rapists' preferences for victims of a given race is not an easy task. Clearly, a comparison of gross percentages (e.g., the percentages of black rapists who choose white versus black victims) is misleading because these percentages are influenced strongly by opportunities for interracial contact as affected by, among other things, the relative sizes of the black and white populations. In order to discern rapists' preferences for victims of a given race, it is necessary to somehow "adjust" the data for these differential opportunities.

We have attempted to do this by examining incidents in which actual contact between a potential rape offender and a potential rape victim has already been established. This adjustment uses *robbery* incidents involving male offenders and female victims.[12] These incidents are then separated into four types: those involving white offenders and white victims, white offenders and black victims, black offenders and white victims, and black offenders and black victims. Then, for each of these types of robbery incidents, we compute the percentage of incidents that involve a rape. Presumably, in the course of robbing either a black or a white woman, a black male offender has roughly

TABLE 4: Percentage of Male Offender–Female Victim Robberies that Include Rape, by Racial Composition, Number of Offenders, Victim-Offender Relationship, and Location[a]

	(1) Total	(2) Single offender	(3) Multiple offender	(4) Stranger	(5) Non-stranger	(6) Private locations	(7) Public locations
White offender– white victim	2.64 (2,615)	3.52 (1,249)	1.83 (1,366)	2.59 (1,773)	2.61 (804)	3.70 (649)	1.95 (1,746)
White offender– black victim	2.65 (565)	9.43 (53)	1.95 (512)	1.94 (464)	6.74 (89)	3.77 (106)	2.26 (443)
Black offender– white victim	2.60 (1,999)	3.85 (935)	1.50 (1,064)	2.64 (1,668)	2.30 (304)	6.55 (336)	1.72 (1,514)
Black offender– black victim	3.88 (798)	5.54 (505)	1.02 (293)	4.78 (523)	2.46 (244)	6.16 (211)	2.27 (529)
χ^2 for column	4.03	7.70	1.39	9.22*	5.61	5.03	.93
χ^2 for black off.–white vict. vs. black off.–black vict.	3.24	2.22	.38	5.99*	.01	.03	.65
χ^2 for white off.–black vict. vs. black off.–white vict.	.01	3.92*	.43	.73	4.25*	1.12	.55

* p<.05

[a] Number of robberies in parentheses

equivalent opportunities to rape the victim. Similarly, we assume that a white robber has the same opportunity to rape a black woman as a black robber has to rape a white woman. Thus, by examining the percentages of robberies that eventuate in rape, we are, to a considerable degree, equalizing opportunities for an offender of a given race to rape a victim of the same or opposite race.

The percentages of robberies of a given racial composition that include rape are shown in the first column of Table 4. Here, as in subsequent columns, we present three significance tests, one contrasting all four race-of-offender/race-of-victim combinations, one contrasting black-on-white robberies with black-on-black robberies, and the third contrasting white-on-black robberies with black-on-white robberies. When all robberies are considered, there is no significant relationship between the racial composition of the robbery and the probability that it includes a rape. In fact, contrary to the conflict model, black offenders slightly prefer black victims to white victims, raping the former in 3.88% of robberies and the latter in 2.60% of robberies, a difference of borderline significance (x^2 = 3.24, p<.10). Overall, however, our findings suggest neither strong in-group nor strong out-group behavioral preferences on the part of rapists, once actual contact with a potential victim has been made.

Conceivably, these percentages based on all robberies of a given racial composition are also misleading because they fail to control for variables that are related to both the racial composition of the robbery and the likelihood that it includes a rape. For example, preliminary analyses indicated that interracial robberies are more likely than intraracial robberies to involve multiple offenders. If the number of offenders is related to the probability that a robbery includes a rape, then this variable could suppress an association between racial composition and rape. It is also possible that intraracial robberies are more likely to occur in private locations (e.g., the victim's home), and that robberies in such locations, being hidden from the view of potential guardians, would be more likely to include a rape.

Accordingly, Table 4 disaggregates the initial percentages by three dichotomous variables: number of offenders (single versus multiple), victim-offender relationship (stranger versus nonstranger), and location of the robbery (private versus public).[13] Perhaps the most striking aspect of these disaggregated percentages is that so few differences are statistically significant. In general, the probability that a robbery incident includes a rape is largely independent of the racial composition of the robbery. Moreover, the few significant differences that do emerge are incompatible with the conflict perspective. For example, among robberies involving strangers (column 4), black offenders are significantly more likely to rape a black victim than a white victim. And, in single-offender (column 2) and nonstranger (column 5) robberies, white offenders are significantly more likely to rape a black victim than black offenders are to rape a white victim. Because of the small number of white-on-black rape incidents, these percentage differences should be interpreted cautiously. Nonetheless, they would seem to dispel the view that black rape offenders have a special attraction to white victims. To the extent that black rapists have a preference for the race of their victim, their choice is more likely a black victim than a white victim.[14] Further, given equivalent opportunities, black rapists are no more likely to choose a white woman than white rapists are to choose a black victim. In fact, our evidence suggests that they may be somewhat less likely to do so. Hence, the overrepresentation of black-on-white rapes and parallel infrequency of white-on-black rapes reported by Katz and Mazur (1979), LaFree (1982), and others appear to result not from differential preferences of white and black rapists, but from differential opportunities for contact with women of the same or opposite race. As argued above, these opportunities themselves are produced by the fundamental properties of urban social structure.

Discussion and Conclusion

In sum, our results are clearly more consistent with a macrostructural opportunity model than with models based on victim-initiated social interaction, black economic deprivation, or black males' barriers to legitimate sexual associations with white women. The probability that a white woman is raped by a black rather than a white offender, and the probability that a black rapist selects a white rather than a black victim, are both strongly influenced by the relative sizes and spatial distributions of the black and white populations. In contrast,

variables implied by the other perspectives are, with few exceptions, unable to explain variation in the racial patterning of rape. Moreover, once the opportunity to rape is essentially held constant, we find no evidence for the conflict hypothesis that black rapists prefer white victims. Given equivalent opportunities, black rapists are about as likely to choose a black victim as a white victim, and about as likely to choose a white victim as a white rapist is to choose a black victim. In fact, during robberies of strangers, blacks are significantly more likely to rape a black woman than a white woman. Interracial rape, therefore, appears to be more a consequence of social-structural arrangements that shape opportunities for interracial contact than of conditions that allegedly foster hostility and rage toward whites on the part of blacks.

To be sure, we did uncover some support for the other perspectives. For example, as predicted by the social interaction model, we found that among white victims education increases the probability of being raped by black offenders rather than white offenders. The interaction model anticipated this effect on the assumption that more educated white women hold more liberal racial attitudes and thus interact more frequently with black men. However, education was found to be a stronger predictor of the racial composition of stranger rape than nonstranger rape; the social interaction model, with its emphasis on rapes among acquaintances, would have predicted the reverse. Moreover, contrary to the social interaction perspective, we found no effect of marital status and a positive rather than a negative effect of age on the probability that a white woman is raped by a black. Hence, empirical support for the social interaction model is weak.

Our results also largely disconfirm the two models drawn from conflict theory, namely, the black deprivation/politicalization model and the sexual access model. Contrary to the latter perspective, the degree of legitimate sexual access to white women available to black men, as indicated by a city's interracial marriage rate, is unrelated to the probability that a white woman is raped by a black offender, once other variables are controlled. Also, the interracial marriage rate was found to be positively rather than inversely associated with the probability that a black rapist selects a white victim. This finding suggests that both interracial marriage and interracial rape are influenced by the properties of social structure that facilitate interracial contacts and associations.

Our evaluation of the black deprivation/politicalization model of interracial rape is generally negative. There was no evidence that city characteristics reflecting blacks' economic deprivation, such as unemployment, poverty, and racial income inequality, influence the racial patterning of rape. Nor did we find the anticipated positive association between the number of racial disturbances and black-on-white rape. Finally, in a comparison of robberies that include rape with those that do not, we found no support for the hypothesis that black rapists prefer white victims.

Admittedly, our evaluation of this perspective is somewhat hindered by the lack of data on the offenders' financial circumstances and racial attitudes. Our focus on the economic characteristics of the black community is nevertheless consistent with Curtis' (1975, 1976) emphasis on subcultural attributes. It is also worth noting that our results are congruent with those of Blau and Blau (1982), who fail to detect an effect of racial inequality on the rape rates of metropolitan

areas, although they do observe such an effect on other crimes (cf. Golden & Messner 1987). While racial inequality has many pernicious consequences, the rape of white women by black men does not appear to be one of them.

The failure of racial inequality to increase rates of interracial rape could stem from several sources. First, it is possible that economic deprivation at the city level does not engender hostility toward whites on the part of blacks. The perceptions of deprivation that give rise to racial animosity may develop from a national, not a local, frame of reference. Relatedly, it is possible that hostility toward whites is not expressed in black-on-white rape. Both of these possibilities seem realistic, given the failure of racial economic inequality to influence the racial patterning of other violent crimes (Messner & South 1986; South & Messner 1986). It is also conceivable that racial inequality exerts counterbalancing influences on interracial crime rates: a positive effect through increased racial hostility, as suggested by conflict theory, and a negative effect through a diminution of interracial contact, as implied by macrostructural opportunity theory.

The only result that might be interpreted as support for the conflict model is the finding that interracial rape is more likely when there are multiple offenders. This was the case in analyses involving the victim's perspective and in those involving the offender's perspective when offenders were strangers. This suggests that group conflict may play some role in interracial rapes. Another interpretation of this effect is that the presence of accomplices emboldens black offenders to attack white victims. Black rapists may view attacks against whites as more serious than attacks against blacks or as more risky in terms of criminal prosecution and punishment, and blacks in groups may be more likely to take this risk. There is a large experimental literature that suggests that groups tend to take more extreme actions than individuals (see, e.g., Shaw 1976, for a review).

The most consistent predictors of the racial composition of rape were not, however, characteristics of the victim or offender, but rather structural features of the urban community. Both the relative sizes of the black and white populations and their distributions in physical space are related to the racial patterning of rape in the expected manner. Hence, our results underscore the utility of applying the macrostructural opportunity framework to a range of intergroup associations. While most tests of the theory have concentrated on cordial intergroup relations such as intermarriage, our analysis suggests that the theory is equally applicable to conflictual social interactions.

Moreover, our results also illustrate some of the ironic implications of the theory. For example, while common sense might suggest that cities containing many cordial intergroup relationships would contain relatively few hostile ones (and vice versa), we find that interracial rape is more common in areas with more, rather than fewer, interracial marriages. This finding was anticipated by Blau's theory (1977:112-16). The effect of residential segregation on the racial patterning of rape is equally surprising. Intuitively, one might expect that less segregated residential patterns reflect harmonious race relations and hence low rates of interracial rape. In fact, we find that, in accordance with macrostructural theory, low levels of segregation are associated with high levels of black-on-white rape. Both of these findings are consistent with the hypothesis that

interracial rape, like other forms of interracial association, is contingent upon opportunities for interracial contact embedded in the urban social structure.

Notes

1. For a description and evaluation of the NCS data on rape, see Hindelang and Davis (1977) and McDermott (1979).

2. Employment information on crime victims younger than seventeen was not collected by the NCS. Since the majority of these women was undoubtedly attending school, we have assumed that these women were not employed at the time of the incident.

3. For rapes involving multiple offenders, the age of the oldest offender is used. The ages of victims and offenders are treated somewhat differently because each victim was asked to report her own age in exact years but the offender's age in very broad categories.

4. For rapes involving multiple offenders, we classify the case as a nonstranger rape if at least one of the offenders was previously known to the victim. While finer breakdowns of victim-offender relationships are available in the NCS, our use of a simple stranger-nonstranger dichotomy both provides comparability with earlier research and avoids small frequencies in certain subgroups.

5. We used data for the 1968-1969 period because of the relative infrequency of racial disturbances after these years. William Kelly generously provided us with these data.

6. Peter Blau graciously provided us with the interracial marriage rates.

7. The nonwhite out-marriage rate, of course, includes marriages between black women and white men, unions that are of questionable relevance for the sexual access model. About three quarters of interracial marriages, however, involve black husbands and white wives (Schoen & Kluegel 1988).

8. Two of the cities in the NCS sample (San Francisco and Oakland) are part of the same SMSA. We assigned both of these cities the nonwhite out-marriage rate for that SMSA.

9. Although it would have been possible to analyze simultaneously the correlates of all three types of rape (i.e., black-on-white, white-on-white, and black-on-black) through multinomial logistic regression (Aldrich & Nelson 1984), we decided against this strategy for two reasons. First, as Swafford (1980) notes, the coefficients from these models are difficult to interpret. Our large sample size allows us to use an easily interpretable technique without unduly sacrificing efficiency of the parameter estimates. Second, our use of the two analytical perspectives corresponds to the conceptual distinction made by O'Brien (1987).

10. The statistical program we use (SPSSX) unfortunately does not compute the likelihood ratio chi-square for these logistic equations. However, given the number of statistically significant coefficients in each equation, as well as significant F-ratios from OLS regressions, we can confidently reject the null hypothesis that all coefficients save the intercept are zero (Aldrich & Nelson 1984:55). Also, although the concept of explained variation is not strictly applicable to logistic regression analysis, we report the R^2 from OLS equations as a rough assessment of the fit of each equation.

11. The results of equation 4 from Tables 2 and 3, estimated separately for stranger and nonstranger rapes, are available from the authors upon request. Because our sample contained relatively few black-on-white acquaintance rapes (N=58), equations run on the subsample of nonstranger rapes should be interpreted cautiously.

12. The data source for this section of the analysis is the national sample of the NCS for the years 1973-1982 (U.S. Department of Justice 1985). Because our focus here is on the percentage of robberies that involve a rape, we are able to include white-on-black incidents in this part of the analysis.

13. The small number of incidents that include both robbery and rape precludes a simultaneous breakdown by all three control variables. Private locations include the victim's dwelling, vacation home, hotel, garage, and apartment hall. Public locations include commercial buildings (other than hotels), offices, schools, and streets.

black rapists actually prefer white over black victims, but refrain from carrying out this preference because they anticipate a greater likelihood of punishment (or more severe punishment) from choosing a white victim. Evidence on this point is mixed. LaFree (1980) finds that, compared to other rape offenders, black rapists of white women are no more likely to be arrested or found guilty, but do receive more serious charges and longer sentences. Whether blacks perceive and act on these differential sanctioning probabilities is, to our knowledge, currently unknown.

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