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# ANY FOUR BLACK MEN WILL DO Rape, Race, and the Ultimate Scapegoat

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This study examines the impact of false rape charges a former Iowa State University student brought against four Black males. Using textual analysis coupled with Barthes's theory of myth, the authors critically examine how the story took hold and the communicative impact of the falsified claims of rape that affected African American men, rape survivors, and women. Using previous scholarship on rape and race (macrocontext), the authors test the scholarly conclusions on the myth of rape and race in a microcontext case study. Thus, they are interested in how the false accusation revived the myth and how Iowa State University and the local community, the regional media, and the campus police perpetuated the myth. The authors argue that racism and sexism are allowed to continue in this situation because of the preservation of White hegemonic patriarchal power. This preservation of White patriarchal hegemony is echoed in macrocontext-level conclusions.

**Keywords:** *hegemony; myth; race; rape; racism; sexism; textual analysis; White supremacy*

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**A pregnant Carol DiMaiti Stewart** and her husband Charles drove to a top birthing facility, Brigham and Women's Hospital, located just outside of Boston's African American community, Mission Hill, also known as "Area B." On the night of October 23, 1989, Charles took a shortcut through Area B. He pulled the car over and shot his wife, then himself in the stomach. He called the police stating that an African American man, posing as an undercover police officer, pulled them over, attempted to rob them, and then shot them at point blank range. Carol and her unborn child died. The death of a White pregnant woman shot by a Black man caused a Black manhunt to begin. William (Willy) Bennett fit the profile of the person falsely alleged to have committed the crime. At the time of Bennett's arrest, police began to suspect Charles of the murder. On January 2, 1990, Matthew Stewart (Charles's brother) revealed Charles's elaborate plan to receive \$100,000 from Carol's life insurance policy. On January 5, 1990, police found Charles's new sports car by the Mystic River and Charles Stewart's body floating in the river. Charles Stewart committed suicide (*Boston: Betrayal in Beantown*, n.d.).

On October 24, 1994, in the small South Carolina town of Union, Susan Smith strapped her 3-year-old and 14-month-old sons into their car seats and rolled the car into the John D. Long Lake. After murdering her own children to win the affections of her lover, Tom Findlay, Susan called the police and said she had been carjacked by a Black man. Nine days later, after the civil rights of countless Black Americans had been violated in the search for the Black perpetrator, Susan confessed to murdering her children, stating she was trying to kill herself. Smith was found guilty of two counts of murder and sentenced to life in prison; she will be eligible for parole after serving 30 years (*CNN: US news year in review: Susan Smith Trial*, n.d.).

On August 28, 2001, Iowa State University (ISU) student, Katie Robb, waiting at a bus stop, reported she was kidnapped at gunpoint at 11 a.m. in front of Gilman Hall, one of the busiest areas on campus. She said four Black men raped her in a wooded area. The news of the kidnapping and rape by four Black men made the front pages of Central Iowa newspapers, including the *Iowa State Daily* and *Ames Tribune*, and was a top story on

regional television news and radio programs. University and local police began looking for any four Black men driving a sedan who fit the profile. Robb's story proved to be inconsistent. On August 30, 2001, Robb admitted she lied.

Although the crime of murder and a false accusation of rape are vastly different, the one common thread in these three examples is that each situation involved the interdependence of criminal scape-goating and race. In each example, Black men were accused of crimes they did not commit. As we have seen in the aforementioned examples, the use of Blacks as convenient scape-goats for White crimes is not new; unfortunately, this historical trend is woven into current culture. This article specifically addresses the Katie Robb incident at ISU. The focus is not on why Robb concocted a story that had devastating consequences on rape survivors, African American men, and women. Rather, this article critically examines the communicative impact Robb's falsified claims of rape had on these three groups. Using Barthes's theory of myth coupled with textual analysis and 17 student interviews, we examine rape and race issues through a macrocontext and microcontext lens. Numerous scholars have examined the issue of rape (Benedict, 1992; Cuklanz, 1996; Estrich, 1987; Hodes, 1997; Moorti, 2002; South & Felson, 1990); however, researchers have neglected to study the effect of false rape charges, the interdependence of race and rape, and the impact of the charges in small, White-dominated communities. Our focus is on Robb's lie about being raped by four Black men in Ames, Iowa, a small, nearly all-White community, which allows us to look at these issues. Specifically, we will focus on the mythological constructions of rape and race and their enduring legacy as demonstrated through this Katie Robb case study. Through Robb's concocted story about being raped, she revived the myth of "White womanhood" as innocent and helpless against the Black violent brute who desires to rape White women.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we examine how Robb revived this myth of rape, the impact this revival had on ISU and the local community, how the campus police perpetuated this myth through its investigation, and how the media supported this myth by not challenging it when Robb admitted she lied. On a microlevel, we argue that

racism and sexism were allowed to continue in this situation because of the preservation of White hegemonic patriarchal power. Robb's actions revived the multiple myths: First, the myth of Black men as violent brutes trying to harm White women. Second, White women as first vulnerable needing to be protected by White men; and then, as liars, needing to be protected by the law. The preservation of White patriarchal hegemony is echoed in macrolevel context conclusions.

### REVIEW OF RAPE AND RACE

One of the greatest myths about rape is that it is primarily a crime committed by Black men against White women (A. Davis, 1985; Wyatt, 1992). This racist myth has its roots in slavery and emancipation. Since slavery, Black sexuality has been stereotyped as wild, uncontrollable, bestial, and even criminal (A. Davis, 1985). These stereotypes have reinforced the beliefs that White women must be protected from Black men.

Interracial relationships between Black and White individuals in the United States date back to the 1600s (F. Davis, 1991; Talty, 2003). Wherever there were slaves and free Blacks, interracial relationships occurred. In the colonies of Maryland and Virginia, both males and females involved in racial mixing were publicly punished (e.g., castrations, flogging, lynching, whippings), and fines, servitude, and/or jail sentences were imposed when interracial sexual contact was discovered (F. Davis, 1991). In the 1700s, as plantation slavery spread and large numbers of Black slaves were moved into the cotton- and rice-growing areas, ownership of a female slave included owning her sex life (F. Davis, 1991). Rapes occurred frequently and many slave owners harshly punished slaves who would not submit (F. Davis, 1991, Talty, 2003). "Large numbers of white boys were socialized to associate physical and emotional pleasure with the Black women who nursed and raised them, and then [were forced] to deny any deep feelings for them" (F. Davis, 1991, p. 38). Some researchers claim that Black women were initiators of relationships and other scholars claim it was rape when slave owners had relationships with their

female slaves (Talty, 2003). Some sexual relationships between Black men and White women appear to have been consensual, but in the 1800s, this type of relationship became dangerous for both parties (Talty, 2003, p. 62) because of the beliefs and stereotypes surrounding cross-racial romantic relationships.

Although F. Davis (1991) noted that “sexual contact between Whites and slaves was tolerated until the number of White women in the colony increased significantly” (p. 35), the uneasy tolerance once given for sexual relationships between Black men and White women quickly changed to violent intolerance once Blacks gained their freedom (Hodes, 1997). Southern White patriarchs challenged the sexual relationships between Black men and White women by claiming that such relations would destroy the White race (Hodes, 1997, p. 147). “The ferocious responses to unions of Black men and White women that have become a cliché of southern ‘honor’—the lynchings, the castrations, the pathological obsession with Black rapists – date mostly from the Civil War period and onward” (Talty, 2003, pp. 53-54). During the early years of Reconstruction, slavery was replaced by lethal violence to control the activities of the freed Blacks, including sexual agency (Hodes, 1997, p. 148). According to MacLean (1994), White Americans, primarily in the South, had the belief that Black men “had an incorrigible desire to rape white women” (p. 142). This led to Whites referring to rape as the “new Negro crime” (MacLean, 1994, p. 142).

The “new Negro crime” created the mythology that Black men rape White women. The creation and perpetuation of this myth of “new Negro crime” stems from Klansman, who used “women as markers in symbolic power plays between men” (MacLean, 1994, p. 146). Since slavery, White men used sex with Black women as a way to humiliate Black men by demonstrating their lack of social power and ability to protect their women (MacLean, 1994, p. 146). Klansmen, conscious of their tradition of using women as a tool for power, soon realized that Black men could also do this. Their fear of a subordinate using this technique to gain power helped create the idea of the Black rapist (MacLean, 1994, p. 146).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (2001) uniform crime report found that 62.7% of arrestees for forcible rape were White.

This is a 12% increase from the 1995 report. The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002) reports that 55.8% of arrestees for rape were White.<sup>2</sup> Research also indicates that most reported cases of rape are intraracial, not interracial. South and Felson (1990) noted that “black rapists are no more likely to choose a white woman than white rapists are to choose a black [woman]” (p. 87). In fact, their evidence suggests that Black rapists are less likely to target White women. A 2001 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics supported 1993 and 1998 results showing that 76% of rapes and sexual assaults for Whites are intraracial and 85.8% for Blacks. Despite this statistical evidence, judges and juries tend to impose harsher penalties for the rape of White women (Estrich, 1987; Wriggins, 1995); Black men who rape White women receive the longest and most severe punishments (Wriggins, 1995). For example, regarding violent offenses in 2000 (violent offenses include “rape/sexual assault, robbery, and assault, but not murder or manslaughter), African Americans served about 2 years longer (8.6 years) than both Whites (7 years) and Hispanics (6.3 years)” (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2004, Sentencing section, para. 3).

Another major myth about rape is that women often fabricate rape stories or cry “rape” because of regret or revenge (Brownmiller, 1975). This notion of false accusation began in the late 19th century, when violence against interracial sexual relationships had escalated (Hodes, 1997). Some White women claimed victimization when a sexual relationship with a Black man was discovered to cover up a relationship with a Black male. Oftentimes, it was the family who used criminal charges to hide the knowledge of an illicit relationship; however, the woman did have to give consent to the criminal charges. Refusal of a White woman to cooperate could result in violence at the hands of White family members or White community members who may be against the interracial relationship (Hodes, 1997, p. 178).

Just as in the past, today the actual number of false accusations remains in question. Various reports list false reports of rape as low as 2% to 3%, similar to the rates of other violent crimes (Brownmiller, 1975; Katz & Mazur, 1979; National Sheriffs’ Association, 2001) or

as high as 40% to 50% (Kanin, 1994). The discrepancy in these statistics may simply be due to the fact that these were different studies of different populations at different times. According to Heather Priess, Ames, Iowa Sexual Assault Response Team Coordinator (SART), false reports of any type of assault are not well researched. SART estimates the number of false assault reports in Iowa at less than 1% (personal communication, April 15, 2005). In fact, sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes in relation to the actual incidence; according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (1999), 62.5% of rapes and sexual assaults are not reported to the police.

For those who do make false accusations, the repercussions affect more than the claimant. False accusations serve to reinforce a “blaming-the-victim” explanation, thereby increasing the probability that women will not report a rape and authorities, friends, and the community at large will disbelieve those who do report a sexual assault.

## MEDIA AND RAPE

The tendency for oversimplified “news” stories feeds the reluctance to move beyond these stereotypical portrayals, which continue to feed the cycle of marginalization of Black men and White women. As Cuklanz (1996) noted in her work on mainstream news coverage of rape trials, “news coverage, though purporting and attempting to be ‘objective,’ presents a skewed picture of many trials, emphasizing verbatim testimony related to character that can be attention-getting, colorful, and even shocking” (p. 49).

Racist- and sexist-mediated portrayals of ethnic minorities and women are not a new phenomenon. In fact, because of these mediated stereotypes, the

essentially racist perception leads to the widely held misconception that most rapes are committed by black men against white women, or by lower class men against higher class women—a conception bolstered by the press, which tends to give these stories more play than other kinds of rapes. (Benedict, 1992, p. 15)

Benedict (1992) astutely observed that

the fact that the most notorious sex crimes between the 1800s and 1950s were cases of black men accused of raping white women not only reflected the history of lynching and racist preoccupation of the press of the time, but is still informing black reactions to sex crime coverage today. (p. 33)

For example, one can see rape and race issues and the myth of the White female “victim” and Black male “criminal” evolving historically in such well-known cases as the Scottsboro Boys case<sup>3</sup> (1931), the murder of Emmett Till<sup>4</sup> (1955), the Kitty Genovese case<sup>5</sup> (1964), the Central Park jogger case<sup>6</sup> (1989/1990), and more recently in the Kobe Bryant case<sup>7</sup> (2003). In each of these cases, White women were, or were allegedly, raped and Black men were charged for the crime. In all of these highly publicized cases, Black men were murdered, jailed, jailed and later found to be innocent, or settled out of court without admitting guilt. The Robb case is similar to these aforementioned cases because she continued the myth of the White female “victim” and the Black male “criminal.” It is the perpetuation of myth that connects these cases of rape and race to the Katie Robb incident.

Although Robb’s false accusation occurred in the 21st century and did not result in the jailing or murder of Black men, her actions and false claim revived and echoed the myth of the “black ravenous brute” and the “young [white] virgin” (Hall, 1983, p. 26). The coverage and reaction to this case (even though Robb was roundly criticized in the media once the lie was revealed) revived, relied on, and reinforced old mythological stereotypes. In this small, Midwestern town, Robb’s lie of being kidnapped and raped in a wooded area in broad daylight by four gun-wielding Black males all more than 6 feet tall is eerily similar to and echoes the fictional account of rape and race in the 1915 KKK movie *Birth of a Nation* designed specifically to promote stereotypes and racist beliefs. In that movie, the innocent, White, virginal young woman was chased in a wooded area, in broad daylight, by a Black brute. However, in that scenario, the woman jumps off of a cliff to escape capture and rape by the ravenous Black brute. Robb, on the other hand, less dramatically but equally virginally, filed a false report with the campus police.

Once she filed the false report and the greater community learned of the event, the same “black brute” and “innocent” White woman myth was temporarily revived.

As Benedict (1992) noted, the coverage of sex crimes during the 1980s and 1990s declined, but the media still covered Black-against-White sex crimes “with exaggerated frequency, class prejudice, and racist stereotypes” (p. 251). Because of this racist and sexist framing of media “reports” in the United States, every time a Black man is accused of raping or attacking a White woman (whether true or not) historical patriarchal White supremacist stereotypes and myths are reinforced. In a social hierarchy that privileges Whites over non-Whites and males over females, false accusations reinforce and thereby strengthen stories of Black men as sexual predators needing to be policed and women crying out for attention. In addition, false accusations reinforce the mediated perception that sexual assault crimes are rarely newsworthy, unless the framing involves a White female victim and Black male perpetrator.

### THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Barthes’s theory of myth, coupled with textual analysis, provides the theoretical and methodological framework of this study. Myths are stories used to explain or to account for events (e.g., creationist myths, such as the Book of Genesis in the Bible). According to Barthes (1995), myth is a form of communication because it is discourse that can be communicated orally, in writing, “photography, cinema, reporting, sports, shows, [and] publicity” (p. 110). “Everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message” (p. 109). Because “it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language” (p. 110), the mythology of rape and race (Black rapists, White victims) has taken on the status of mythological sustainability.

In conducting our textual analysis, we analyzed articles published about the rape-race incident found in *The Ames Tribune*

(local newspaper), *The Iowa State Daily* (ISU student newspaper), *Ethos* (ISU student magazine), and comments from 17 participants. Textual analysis also provided the foundation from which we examined the interview responses from 17 participants.<sup>8</sup> A textual analysis of the interview statements allows one to see how in this case study of rape and race, larger macrocontext mythologies emerge. The textual analysis of the newspaper articles and the participant statements illuminate the connection between macro- and microrape and race events.

## BACKGROUND

On August 28, 2001, Katie Robb, a White female sophomore at ISU, stood in front of Gilman Hall at 11 a.m., one of the busiest places on campus, waiting for her bus to arrive. Before her bus arrived, Robb reported she was approached by a Black man at least 6 feet tall with a gun who “demanded she go with him” (Drewry, 2001, para. 4). The man forced her into his Toyota Camry or Honda Accord, where three other Black men, all about 6 feet tall, were waiting. The men then took her to a “wooded area, where they sexually assaulted her and released her” (para. 6). On reporting the crime to the campus police, Robb said the man who kidnapped her had been someone with whom she had had run-ins before and “matched the description of an individual that has confronted her recently” (para. 19). Based on her description of the assailants, a Black manhunt ensued in which the entire community was looking for four Black men.

By August 30, 2001, the search for the four Black men ended. Robb admitted she fabricated her claim. She was neither kidnapped nor sexually assaulted. She was “in class at the time the alleged kidnapping and rape happened” (Allen, 2001a, para. 5). On September 4, 2001, Robb was charged with “filing a false sexual assault report which carries a sentence of up to one year in jail, a \$1,500.00 fine or both” (Calef, 2001b, para. 7). On October 25, 2001, Robb pled guilty to the charges. She was required to perform “100 hours of community service,” and if she successfully completes her probation, “the judgment will be deferred and the crime will not appear

on her record” (Frierson, 2002, pp. 20-21). Robb, who has never offered a reason for her allegation, apologized numerous times, stating “I wish I could take it all back or make everyone understand or I wish I could have said the guy was white. I wish people would at least be willing to think that I might be sorry” (Frierson, 2002, p. 20). When asked what she would do to ameliorate the situation, Robb said, “It’s like I have 100 hours of community service that I have to report. So, I’ll do my community service and do that for the city, but it’s like . . . I don’t know exactly what to do” (p. 20). Robb no longer attends ISU, and she may be sorry. However, it is questionable whether her apology and absence are enough to repair the damage her false claim did to African American males, rape survivors, those who may need to report a rape in the future, and women in general.

### WHY FOUR BLACK MEN?

Why four Black men, and why was it possible for Robb to concoct this falsified claim? The Robb incident was only a 2-day event, yet 2 years later, when we conducted this study, based on participant comments, it was as if the event had just happened in the ISU community because of the revival of rape and race mythology that had not been addressed. Katie Robb reported she was kidnapped by four Black men at gunpoint at 11 a.m. in a highly visible campus location, taken to a wooded area nearby and raped. The probability of this type of rape actually occurring is very rare. According to Greenfield (1997), less than 7% of sexual assaults are committed by multiple strangers; only 33% of all sexual assaults are committed between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.; slightly more than 6% have a firearm present, and about 12% are interracial rapes. Thus, the intersection of these four factors is highly improbable. Although Robb claims it was not a “racist issue” (Allen, 2001a, para. 10) and it was “not a discriminatory thing” (Frierson, 2002, p. 20), her actions set in motion a racist and discriminatory chain of events. Robb revived the myth of Black men raping White women, the police perpetuated the mythology through the course of their required investigation, and

the media supported the myth generally (except the *Iowa State Daily*) by not challenging the myth when it was revealed Robb lied. Thus, a racist myth echoing stereotypes from the Reconstruction era took hold in Ames, Iowa, the home of ISU.

Ames, Iowa, the home of ISU, is a small homogenous university town of 51,589 people located in the Midwest. Ames residents are 73.7% White and 1.6% Black (Living in Ames, 2003). ISU is also predominantly White. At the time of the falsified crime, during the 2001 school year, African American students at ISU were 2.5% of the population and White students were 83.8% of the population. More recently, African American students constituted 2.8% of the population and White students constituted 83.6% of the population (ISU, n.d.). More than 20% of the ISU student body are non-Iowa residents (ISU, n.d.). However, a largely White homogenous small town does not mean that residents are more likely than those in larger communities to believe in a falsified crime with overt racial overtones.

Despite the veneer of Midwestern hospitality, Ames has been negatively affected by America's racist history. Issues involving rape, race, crime, and any mythologies that may follow can and have affected all areas of the United States. Therefore, a story about a falsified rape, alleged Black perpetrators, and the narratives and myths invoked is just as likely to happen in Ames and anywhere else in the country. Once the mythologies involving rape and race were revitalized by Robb, a deep festering wound of racism was revealed. The microcontext crime was easily solved, but the macrocontext issues involving race and racism lingered. The lingering effects of the macrocontext societal issues of race and rape were evidenced in our participant statements. For example, all of the participants were aware of Robb's falsified crime. Our participants were unanimously critical of her concocted story, her specified scape-goating of Black males, and the damage done to African American men, rape survivors, and women in general. Andy,<sup>9</sup> an interviewed student, summed common student microcontext observations well:

Given that the school is mostly White, there is really a lot of hesitation to stereotype into your own community. If someone who is White does something, you know a person who is White is just

going to look at them as abnormal or not in the norm. If I were a minority student, I would think that maybe what Katie Robb did was because she was a racist. The fact that it was four Black men that she claimed, I guess that is just another detail that gets lost in the whole case.

His contention echoed that of other participants: What Katie Robb did was wrong and could be seen as racist. In the reduction of his statement, what is not addressed at any level in this case are the macrocontext issues that continue to reverberate: race, rape, and mythology. The stereotypes regarding Black males, general stereotypes, and mythology extend beyond this microcontext situation. When one third of our participants (6) believe that African Americans use race and racism (also pejoratively referred to “playing the race card”) to cover-up Black action, criminality, or responsibility—even in a situation such as this—naturalized stereotypes and myths such as these have the ability to take hold and resonate, even in a small community such as Ames. That is why years after the incident and 2 years into our data collection, we found the mythology of Black male violence used against White women to be palpable and still quite raw. For example, Chad stated, after the falsified rape charges were disproved, that

there is a subconscious fear of African American men targeting white women. Probably because of the pervasiveness of racial stereotypes in our society, and probably more so in the Midwest. I guess it would be greater here because of ignorance and lack of exposure.

This student was able to discern that Robb’s actions were wrong, but he was unable to make that leap from recognizing microcontext race issues to debunking macrocontext racist myths. The mythological misrepresentations associated with “African American men targeting white women” are less about the lack of exposure or ignorance regarding Black race relations in Ames, Iowa, than the continuation of the “Black male brute” and the “White innocent female” juxtaposition and mythology.

Historically, the dominant conceptualization of rape as quintessentially involving a black offender and a white victim has left

black men subject to legal and extralegal violence. The use of rape to legitimize efforts to control and discipline the black community is well established. (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 367)

Despite the efforts of antiracists, and our participants generally, to challenge this racist, mythological cultural narrative, the continued legacy of scapegoating Black males for falsified rape claims remains. Robb's falsification fed into the national mythology of Black male violence (i.e., Black men are brutes, Black men commit crimes, Black men rape White women) that indirectly justifies the policing of the hypervisible Other to protect the White majority.

Black bodies, particularly Black male bodies, as they are often portrayed in the news and entertainment media, are associated with crime, drugs, gangs, and violence. As one student, Jen, stated, "People associate African Americans with violent crimes more often than White, especially in the Midwest. Usually when I hear [a crime] happened, it is a Black male." The myth of the oversexed violent Black male is a Reconstruction-era created mythology. It was then believed that White women had to be protected from the switchblade-wielding Black male rapist. In Robb's falsified claim, she reconstructed that same myth, only the switchblade was replaced with a gun. Myths of Black male violence are common, whether found in print, pictures, or in mediated representations such as the nightly news. Some Black men do attempt to embody the stereotype and myth of the hyperviolent, oversexed male to be taken as "cool" and not somebody to "mess with" (see, bell hooks's, 2003, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, and Richard Majors and Janet Billson's, 1993, *Cool Pose*). This hypermasculinity is most visually seen in hip hop and rap videos. However, although these men may be enacting the "cool pose" (see Richard Majors and Janet Billson's, 1993, *Cool Pose*), they are also enacting contemporary hegemonic representations of Black masculinity that fuel Black violent mythology. Given the fact that the majority of African American students who attend ISU are from out of state, the myths and stereotypes of the inner city, particularly the violence of African American men, apply. In a predominantly White community, the stereotypes of African Americans go unchallenged, causing the myth of the

Black male to be activated. Therefore, when Jen makes the leap from crime to African American men, then the charge of four Black men raping an innocent White Iowan woman is not difficult to believe. Nor, based on racist stereotypes, is the assumption that this is not a crime four White men from Iowa would do.

Of course, not all people from Ames, Iowa, believed the falsified crime, and there was overt criticism of Robb. The incident became an immediate regional media sensation. However, once the truth was revealed and the falsified crime was disclosed, only the *Iowa State Daily* editorial board denounced the falsification:

After looking at the implications of what these accusations did to the atmosphere at the university, we think she needs to be charged with filing a false report and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Not only did she invoke terror and concern in the entire student body, she also singled out four black men, a cowardly claim that seems to suggest possible racial undertones. (Editorial Board, 2001, para. 3-4)

Despite one denunciation of the lie, suspicion about Black men as potential rapists lingered because the macrocontext mythology surrounding the case was never challenged. To challenge the allegations against the Black men in this case was to challenge the national narrative surrounding Black men. However, very few challenged that mythology. For example, one student said, after the incident was proven false, that "I was looking for Black males on campus. I was just walking around checking out cars and thinking about it. I would imagine that others may have had similar reactions" (Brandon, interviewed student). Similarly, Chad said, "African American men at night were a potential threat" (interviewed student). When Robb revived the myth of dangerous Black men, both men and women actively profiled for the mysterious "four Black men." In addition, many may have taken steps to avoid encounters with Blacks, because the national mythology was now in their own backyard. Even the first author of this article, not a Black male, was profiled by campus police on the day the public learned of the so-called rape. I can only assume I was stopped because I am African American and, therefore, "I might know Black men." The effect of the rhetoric of racism and sexism was palpable.

## WHY FOUR BLACK MEN AND THE EFFECTS ON WOMEN AND RAPE SURVIVORS

The dominance of White over Black and male over female collide to show the interdependence of discrimination, power, and control (Lakoff, 2000). A myth may find salience in a community because of a believed "truth" regardless of whether there is factual evidence to substantiate the belief in that "truth." "Mythologies may allow us to project out onto them traits we detest in ourselves or hope we do not possess but fear we do" (Lakoff, 2000, p. 132). In the case of Katie Robb, the perpetuation of the myth was done by the campus police, university, and the local media outlets. Throughout the 2-day duration of this case, the aforementioned groups provided very little information regarding race, racism, or facts associated with rape. Rather, narration was controlled by those with the power to challenge it, and subsequently, mythology was allowed to flourish.

Issues of rape and race (especially in well-publicized cases such as this one) are seen as controversial, emotional, and sensitive issues. Because of Robb's actions and the various mythologies, White women may be perceived negatively and the reputation of future rape victims could possibly be damaged and discredited by Robb's "crying wolf." Robb's actions made White women seem as if "they'll do anything to make their point or get attention. I think it looked more negatively on the white female [who] made the accusation" (Caroline, student interviewed). In fact, Robb's lies not only can be used as a tool to reinscribe hegemony but also as a disqualification of legitimate future rape claims and cases. Sadly, Robb's false claim lends credence to the myth that women "cry wolf" about rape to seek attention. These are myths and stereotypes that feminists, as well as other groups in society, have sought to challenge. In noting this theme, our participants saw how Robb's actions contributed to this belief about women and rape. Robb's actions also crossed the color barrier, as Helen noted when she linked the national mythologies between rape and race: Robb's actions "had an affect on the way [I] view white females. It damaged my perspective on that particular age group. I think it damaged their credibility."

Robb's actions also contributed to the racial divide that exists between Black women and White women. For example, Crenshaw (1995) found that

the plight of black women is relegated to a secondary importance: the primary beneficiaries of policies supported by feminists and others concerned about rape tend to be white women, and the primary beneficiaries of the black community's concern over racism and rape tend to be black men. (p. 368)

White female privilege in how society responds to rape can be seen most dramatically in the aforementioned 1989 Central Park rape. Calls to find the jogger's rapist were made and Donald Trump took out ads, totaling \$85,000, in four New York newspapers "demanding that New York 'Bring back the Death Penalty, Bring Back Our Police'" (p. 368). In searching for the rapist,

twenty-eight other cases of first-degree rape or attempted rape were reported in New York. Many of these rapes were as horrific as the rape in Central Park, yet all were virtually ignored by the media. Some were gang rapes, and in a case that prosecutors described as "one of the most brutal in years," a woman was raped, sodomized, and thrown fifty feet off the top of a four-story building in Brooklyn. Witnesses testified that the victim "screamed as she plunged down the air shaft." . . . She suffered fractures of both ankles and legs, her pelvis was shattered and she suffered extensive internal injuries. This rape survivor, like most of the other forgotten victims that week, was a woman of color. (p. 368)

How extreme must rape of a woman of color be to be deemed "news" and "newsworthy?" The mythology of rape in the United States goes back to slavery. It has been well documented that cases involving rape of a White woman were more likely to be prosecuted than rape of a Black woman, which was not prosecuted (see Benedict, 1992; Brownmiller, 1975; A. Davis, 1985; Hodes, 1997; Moorti, 2002, Wriggins, 1995; Wyatt, 1992). Even though White women were privileged by virtue of their Whiteness, the male head of household had strong control over the sexuality of his female dependents. Because racial lineage was determined by the mother, this control was viewed as a way to preserve racial hierarchy

(MacLean, 1994). This legacy of protecting only White women has, unfortunately, created a gendered hierarchy, based on White patriarchal dominance, where one woman is protected over another. This unwarranted privileging of White women over Black women in the Black/White binary has contributed to contemporary notions of womanhood and mythology. Based on the gendered hierarchy that is part of this history, it is likely the Robb case received more publicity because of the supposed violent nature of the crime and because it was an alleged interracial rape.

### WHY ANY MEDIA COVERAGE?

I think that news gets old. [My incident] is already old to a lot of people. As horrible as it sounds, once September 11 happened, I was out of the paper. I was gone. I'm not happy that thousands of people died or anything like that, but that took the attention off me. It's like, I hurt feelings and I offended people and I do feel bad about that, but it isn't a terrorist act. I wasn't trying to terrorize the people of Iowa State or anything like that. It kind of made it seem a little sillier to be writing to the editor about a girl telling a story once airplanes were flying into the World Trade Center. (Robb, in an interview with Frierson, 2002, p. 21)

Media have the power to tell stories and determine which stories get told. Robb's falsified report was a top story in the news until the terrorist attacks on September 11, as Robb notes, bumped her temporarily off the front pages. However, Robb's actions remained newsworthy because of the unusualness of the case. Like other people in Iowa, we learned about the falsified charges in the Robb case through various media. The institutional power of the media shapes, constructs, and frames an event maintaining hegemonic dominance over how rape survivors, African American men, and White women are seen (see Jamieson & Waldman, 2002). Newspapers and television often do not portray rape victims accurately. If a woman strays from the "acceptable bounds" of womanly behavior, this behavior is held against her, particularly during a rape trial. Because the victim is scrutinized much more than the rapist, reporting a rape, whether falsified or not, contributes to patriarchal privilege. Moorti (2002) pointed out that feminist criticism of the

one-sided portrayal of rape victims has led news workers to focus their attention on the accused (p. 73). The focus on the accused, instead of the accuser, has caused the accuser to essentially disappear from the story and the violation becomes “a symbolic cause for the discussion of other issues” (p. 73). However, in the case of this falsified claim, Robb was initially protected and the identity of the four alleged perpetrators leaked: four black men all more than 6 feet tall. When it was revealed Robb lied, her identity was revealed. Although the media covered the issue of rape and race, there was little media coverage, except acknowledgements from rape crisis prevention teams, as it related to rape and women who have survived rape.

The reporting of false claims exacerbates issues around rape because the threshold of proving one was actually raped is that much higher. If a rape victim happens to be a woman of color, she has issues of racism to demythologize in addition to gender. As Julie Wooden, director of sexual assault services at Assault Care Center Extending Shelter and Support in Ames, Iowa, noted, “public perception about the legitimacy of sexual assault claims may be fueled by the media. A lot of times in the media, it’s the false allegations that get a lot of press” (Weiskircher, 2001, para. 8-9). In addition, making falsified rape charges only makes it that much more difficult for all rape survivors. For example, once it was revealed that Robb lied, the Story County and ISU outreach coordinators hoped “women won’t be more reluctant to report sexual assault” (para. 1). Julie Harders, coordinator of the SART in Ames, Iowa, responded to the rape incident by stating,

If a woman admits her claim was untrue, victims may be more reluctant to report an assault. Sexual assault victims have a fear that they won’t be believed and this [Robb’s false report] certainly doesn’t help put away those fears. (para. 6-7)

Three of our student respondents feared that when a woman reported a rape it would be seen as a joke because of the Robb incident.

Our analysis demonstrates that race superseded rape in this case. The fear of African American men fleeing from a crime of rape mythology was more important than the story of rape itself.

These stereotypes contribute to the mythologies that have infiltrated our society. Before mediated communication, oral narratives regarding race were told. As Benedict (1992) referencing Brownmiller surmised, “lynching stories [were to] keep white women in their place by exacerbating their fear of rape, and functioned to keep black men in their place by depicting them as dangerous, subhuman, and prone to arrest” (p. 30).

Although Iowa media outlets were ultimately critical of Robb’s false accusation, once Robb filed the false claim of rape and once mediated forms revealed the incident to the public, antiquated notions of race, gender, and womanhood were already revived. Because the media were able to criticize Robb in a microcontext setting but unable to engage in dialogue and criticism surrounding rape and race in a macrocontext, the perception that African American men are dangerous, criminal, depraved, and prey on White women was perpetuated. These common macrocontext mythologies are echoed in participant statements: “Television and movies have portrayed African American males as uncivilized or having a more violent nature. So there is a perception that [African American men are] more danger[ous]” (Caroline, interviewed student); “a lot of people from Iowa State and Iowa have never been exposed to African Americans and the only things that they see on TV are black people with guns and knives who live in housing projects. That was the worst thing that [Robb] could do—reinforce the stereotype” (Margaret, interviewed student); “I never made friends with those people [people of color]. I’m more comfortable with people of white color. I think I would be more scared if [the rape suspects were] four black males than four white males” (Diesel, interviewed student); “I am more threatened by non-White males or African American males, particularly as it concerns targeting White women because [African American men targeting White women] can be seen in any movie or anything” (Anne, interviewed student).

Whether intentionally or not, Iowa media continued the macrocontext mythology of violent Black men. Before Iowa residents and the media knew Robb’s claim had been falsified, the mediated organizations did their job—they reported on a newsworthy event.

However, once the media and Iowa residents learned that Robb had concocted the event and that there were no gun-wielding “four Black males” loose in Iowa, the media had a second potential story: challenging the macrocontext nature of Robb’s revived mythology. However, that did not happen. The now-victimized “four Black men” were still reduced to the stereotype Robb concocted: tall and Black. There was no specific identity. Every Black male on campus became a suspect. Robb collectively identified all Black males as the same by failing to give any type of description other than race and height. None of her Black males were fat, were bald, or had dreadlocks, tattoos, or piercings. Even though none were described as wearing masks or anything else to hide or alter their identity, Robb was unable to provide any distinguishing features. This is especially significant because she reported she had a previous interaction with one of the “kidnappers.” This description of Black men could be found in any macrocontext setting. The mythology of violent Black males continues.

Although media play a primary role in shaping attitudes and beliefs about minorities, it does not create events, but it can spin an event to make it interesting and noteworthy or can even make it go away. According to Lakoff (2000), “the media take special notice when language drives events and narrative [myth] becomes the creator of reality” (p. 261). An example of this can be found in the reporting of the Robb incident in the *Ames Tribune*. The very first story begins: “An Iowa State University student allegedly was abducted from campus Tuesday afternoon and sexually assaulted by four males in a wooded area, ISU Department of Public Safety Officials said today” (Jividen, 2001a, para. 1). This story goes on to mention there was a gun, and in the second to last paragraph, it mentions the assailants as four Black males. As the stories about the incident and false report evolved through the months, even after it was proven Robb falsified the crime, the terminology slowly changed from abducted to kidnapped at gunpoint by four Black males and from sexual assault to rape.<sup>10</sup> One of the last stories written in the *Ames Tribune* wraps up with the sentence, “She said the men took her to a wooded area where they gang-raped her” (Allen, 2001b, para. 6). As the story transformed from sexual abduction to

rape to a false report, the language became more dramatic and the story more sensationalized. Because those affected by the mythology were not the initial creators of the myth (although they can intentionally or inadvertently reify the myth), the controlling or hegemonic group telling the story has a set of shared interests, and these interests are reflected in the kind of discourse that is taken seriously, which renders their discourse as neutral (Lakoff, 2000, p. 58). In other words, the discourse by the hegemonic group is considered reasonable, socially responsible, normal (p. 58).

Wilson and Russell (1996) found that “the media, in all their forms, ultimately mirror and maintain popular notions of women and African Americans” (p. 244). And because not all women or men are created equally, the status and honor of Euro-American men is indirectly (and unjustly) enhanced each time African American men are framed as rapists, thieves, burglars, murderers, and so forth. In this sense, Robb’s actions and her engagement of mythology help sustain racist, stereotypical constructs of masculinity that suggest White men are somehow superior to (and more honorable and trustworthy) than men of any other race or ethnicity.

A study by Meyers (1997, p. 85) sought to examine the journalistic process in determining the newsworthiness of violent crimes against women. The primary rationale for running a story, according to reporters, was “unusualness.” Cases of domestic violence and rape are often dismissed unless they have an unusual twist (p. 98). For example, the rape of an elderly woman would be considered newsworthy because it stirs our emotions; however, the rape of a younger woman is less important unless they are White and middle-class (p. 98). The local Iowa media had the power to challenge existing macrocontext mythologies and stereotypes in terms of rape and race, but they abstained. The unusualness of Robb’s case sparked immediate television and newspaper coverage. Yet once it was known that this was a falsely reported case, the coverage diminished.

It’s typical of media to blow up and sensationalize the story at the beginning and then when there is a resolution—there is no story and they tend to under-report it. I know she was faced with criminal charges, but I don’t remember seeing the eventual outcome. (Pam, interviewed student)

On a micro- and macrocontext scale, it is problematic that the student does not know the eventual outcome in this case. Although Pam may not have continued to follow the story, none of our participants knew the eventual outcome of this case. This lack of knowledge could demonstrate the reluctance of the university, media, and campus police to move this case from a microcontext myth (all participants knew that Robb faced criminal charges) to challenging a macrocontext myth (none of the respondents knew what happened after Robb faced criminal charges and the impact on African men and rape survivors). This lack of knowledge surrounding the conclusion of the concocted case may be a response to the false notion that women routinely “cry wolf” when it comes to rape, so the journalists no longer felt it was newsworthy. Thus, in the case of this falsified rape coverage, the media would have to admit that (a) this was a “newsworthy” event and (b) that such an admission denies objectivist ideology justifying media content. If such an admission occurred, news media could no longer claim to be an “unbiased” or objective entity but rather would admit to being a myth-driven, “selective” news and “newsworthy” organization. A story that was once the main story in all regional media outlets when the mysterious “four Black men” were roaming about was no longer a regional media event once it was learned that a White woman lied. Thus, media outlets reinforced White patriarchal, racist, mythological stereotypes by forcing the story into the background.

In addition, the impact on rape survivors was silenced. There was no story. The issue of rape was invisible. The university campus taped up flyers to help find the perpetrators of the “crime,” but there were no university-wide conversations about rape, and not one media outlet focused on the crime of rape. Interracial rape cannot be understood without examining the role rape plays—even a falsified rape in this case, because rape cannot be understood without understanding media complicity in capitalizing on and perpetuating historical and cultural racist and sexist stereotypes. As Cuklanz (1996) noted, “it is discouraging to find that after decades of working to articulate victims’ experiences of rape trials, news stories still do not include coherent or complete depictions of these experiences” (p. 114).

Rape in this case became invisible to race. Through patriarchal framing, it was more important to find “four Black men” (to protect the mythological White womanhood) than it was to address the crime of rape that affects all women but is perpetuated by any and all men. The media were a powerful force in shaping this falsified crime; however, in failing to challenge macrocontext mythologies, they inadvertently maintained racist and sexist ideologies.

### WHY UNIVERSITY LACK OF ATTENTION AND THE POLICE INVESTIGATION?

ISU is also powerful in shaping its university’s response to crisis, such as rape—even if the crime is falsified. The university and the campus police had the greatest influence on how Iowans came to learn about and understand the Katie Robb incident. A law enforcement officer was interviewed to clarify and learn about investigation procedures once a crime has been alleged. This information is detailed in subsequent pages. This officer requested confidentiality.

ISU was quick to respond and let the public know that a crime had been committed on campus. ISU had flyers placed around campus informing the student body and personnel that a “crime” had occurred; the entire campus and Ames community were on alert for “four Black men.” ISU and campus police used a variety of media outlets to inform the public. But the crime was falsified. The interesting question is, was it necessary to inform the public and the media about “four Black men?” And, if so, was it not also necessary to discredit and recant the previous “necessary to inform the public” justifications after the falsification was revealed? The police must investigate any allegation of a crime. Therefore, because the campus police acted quickly in this case, it could be argued that they acted quickly to dispel the lie while alerting the community to their actions. In fact, in an interview with the *Iowa State Daily*, Robert Price, President of Black Student Alliance, and half (8) of the interviewed students believed that ISU and campus police took appropriate measures in investigating the alleged crime because Robb faced criminal charges for her false allegations. This interviewee data are significant because

they support the overall storyline that the false rape allegation was dealt with quickly by authorities. However, just because the situation is dealt with quickly does not mean that macrocontext myths are resolved or that anger regarding the situation dissipated. Two years after the false allegation, frustration still surrounded the judicial outcome of Robb's case. For example, despite the fact that our participants believe the police and university acted quickly, they also stated that more measures need to be taken because of the damage done to African American males and that Robb should be in jail.

Even Robb, after admitting her actions were "bad," realized the actions of the ISU police did not help the image of ISU and, in fact, made the situation worse. According to Robb, she was disappointed in the campus police because they knew she had falsified the incident:

I don't want to take any of the blame off myself because this is all my fault. . . . [The campus police] promised my parents that night [the night the alleged crime was committed] that they weren't going to press charges, and they knew it wasn't true before they ever told the *Daily*. So it's like they had no reason to be putting it in the paper. (Frierson, 2002, p. 20)

In addition to Robb's statement, it was reported in the *Ames Tribune* that "Deisinger said it was clear the student made up the story after an exhaustive series of interviews, investigations and searches by public safety officials and the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation" (Jividen, 2001b, para. 6). "Officials say they also knew the story was false because 'we know her location at the time of the incident,' Deisinger said" (para. 11). In two subsequent stories reporting on the false report and how Katie Jividen handled the initial story (Jividen and Robb were friends), the paper quoted Capt. Deisinger of the ISU's Department of Public Safety saying "from early on we had concerns about the truthfulness of the report" (Allen, 2001a, para. 6) and "almost immediately, Jividen began gleaning from police sources the report may be false" (Tribune Editorial Board, 2001, para. 6).

If Robb is being truthful about campus police knowledge that the rape was falsified, if the newspapers also suspected the report

was falsified, and the campus police already determined that she was “in class at the time the alleged kidnapping and rape happened” (para. 5), was it important to inform the public that a rape occurred? Was it also necessary to inform the public of “four Black men” if the campus police already knew or even suspected the alleged victim was lying? If the police already determined she lied, then why release to the media the fact that the alleged criminals were four Black men? Police departments often withhold information from the public regarding crimes. Was this detail necessary to release to the media when her story was not only unverified but also questionable? Instead, people in central Iowa were looking for a Black menace that did not exist.

According to Robb’s version of events and newspaper reports, the campus police knowingly perpetuated the racist mythology by releasing false information to the public. We are forced to conclude that the police willingly continued a macrocontext stereotypical myth (violent Black males, innocent White woman) because they released information and allowed for the news story to proceed. If we question Robb’s version of events regarding campus police action, then she is denying responsibility for her actions (even though she denies this) and thus places blame on the shoulders of the campus police. She is trying to make her choices the responsibility of the police, thus negating her part in the creation of her falsified claim. Through this action, Robb could, therefore, be seen as “innocent” and the campus police as “bad” and willfully targeting Black males. Police protocol dictates that the lead agency determines whether a complainant’s statement is truthful and, based on the interview with the complainant, determines what information will go out to other law enforcement agencies. The lead agency in this case was the ISU campus police. After interviewing Robb, the campus police decided to distribute a description of the “assailants” and their vehicle despite the vague description. The other agencies, such as the Ames Police Department and Iowa Division of Criminal Investigations, acted on the intelligence given to them by the ISU campus police.

Why is it the police released Robb’s very vague and stereotypical description of the “Black criminal”: male, more than 6 feet tall, brandishing a gun? In the initial report of the incident, Gene

Deisinger, a member of the special operations unit for the campus police, investigator, and campus police spokesman regarding this case, said Robb reported that the supposed criminal was not a stranger: "She doesn't know him personally, but she has had other run-ins with him. He matches the description of an individual that has confronted her recently" (Drewry, 2001, para. 19). Therefore, the ISU campus police could have been acting on probable cause and immediate need to protect the public. However, this probable cause becomes suspect if there is no evidence to back it up. No witnesses were found to corroborate her story (even though she claimed it happened at a crowded bus stop in broad daylight) and she provided only vague details about her assailants and their vehicle. Not only is the credibility of her story diminished, but her story was full of inconsistencies from the beginning.

According to campus police, during the 2-day investigation, because of inconsistencies in her statement, it was determined Robb lied. If, however, we believe Robb's version of events and the police determined that she lied before information was released to the public, then we have an extreme case of White patriarchal supremacy and racial profiling supporting Black male mythology. According to Deisinger, agencies throughout "Central Iowa were very diligent in their attempts to locate the vehicle. A number of officers and supply personnel worked around the clock" (Calef, 2001a, para. 13). However, on September 4, 2001, in an interview contradicting statements in his previous interviews, Deisinger stated that she never named a specific individual and "there was [sic] never any suspects, [and there was] never a viable suspect" (Calef & Weiskircher, 2001, para. 8). This means that the campus police, as the lead agency, chose to release information to surrounding police agencies after it was determined that she lied or, at minimum, did not believe she was telling the truth. This is reckless because it needlessly puts other police agencies on high alert and constitutes reasonable suspicion/probable cause for well-meaning police officers of other agencies to stop and detain African American males. By choosing to release the vague description and falsified claim a White woman made about four Black men, whether intended or not, the ISU campus police engaged in racial profiling, perpetuated the mythology of the violent Black male, and

potentially led other city and state agencies (acting on information given to them by the ISU campus police) and the media to inadvertently do the same. As *ISU Daily* editor Andrea Hauser stated,

when we reported the rape claim [campus police], Ames and Story County law enforcement officials were combing the area searching for these four men. Bulletins were around campus advising people to walk in groups or use the [campus police] escort service, and it was scary. So we included the race detail as a way to help aid the search. (Hauser, 2001, para. 10-11)

A lingering question is revealed in the search for the mythological four Black males: Why did ISU decide to publicize the alleged assault, especially if campus police had their doubts? ISU officials created a Web site of 10 questions and answers that covered the Katie Robb incident. When asked if Robb's story seemed improbable, Jon Stewart, interim director of ISU campus police, said that "we take all reports of crime very seriously. However, it was not until the next day that we had evidence that contradicted any of her claims" (University Relations, 2001, para. 2). Stewart contradicts Robb's version of events. Gene Deisinger noted that "most alleged sexual assaults turn out to be true" and "we don't let unusual behavior from alleged crime victims prejudice us. We investigate the facts and go where they take us" (para. 3). When asked why they did not relay information to the public until after they were more certain a crime had actually occurred, university administration cited concern for the public, noting that once a crime is alleged, it must be investigated. When asked why university officials described the men as "Black males," Deisinger replied that "Robb provided a description of her alleged assailants and their car. We hoped that someone might identify the suspects from the description, allowing us to move forward in the investigation" (para. 10). When asked how the crime might affect the community, Teresa Branch, former assistant vice president for student affairs, stated there was concern for the whole community, "but in the end, we needed to take the accusation seriously and get the word out" (para. 11). And Carla Espinoza, assistant vice president for human services, followed up by stating that "based on

what we knew at the time, there just isn't much that could have been done differently" (para. 12).

Beyond this Web site Q&A session, the authors of this article had difficulty in learning about university procedures regarding this specific case about falsified rape. In attempting to receive permission to conduct this study, we were derailed by university administration. Two years after this incident, we were "stonewalled" in receiving approval for this study, until it was evident that the student participants we hoped to interview had left Ames, Iowa, for the summer or graduated. The general consensus was that because the university administration and campus police addressed questions regarding Robb's falsification through a Web site Q&A, there was no need for elaboration. Beyond the Q&A session, there was no formal statement released by the university or campus police after this case was investigated, because as was often repeated, it was now a matter for the courts. The ISU administration's reticence to speak unfortunately keeps the public uninformed and perpetuates stereotypical macrocontext mythologies because there is no overt challenge to them—Black men are violent and White women lie about rape. The commonly known macrocontext mythologies remain intact and unresolved.

Regrettably, university and campus police action to this falsified crime was one that reinforced sexism and racism. In searching for the mythological four Black men, the action taken by the police and by university administration reified women's role as nonexistent (particularly after the search for potential suspects had ceased). Ultimately, despite media coverage to the contrary, the most visible female "victim" was Robb, the accuser, because the macrocontext mythology surrounding Black men remained in place. There were no televised stories on how to assist rape survivors. Rather, through the media, university, and campus police action, we learned that searching for four African American male scapegoats supercedes any potential crime against women. Although it is true that the police were looking for leads and suspects in an attempt to catch the perpetrators who supposedly committed this crime against a woman, it appears that the campus police doubted Robb's claims because of inconsistencies in her statements.

Additionally, in searching for “four Black men,” White supremacist patriarchy was sanctified through the supposed necessary protection of White womanhood. Women’s groups were seemingly absent during this case. Although there were flyers warning students to look for “four Black men,” there was no informational rally against rape or informational rally about how to safely report a rape in light of the inhospitable environment created by Robb’s actions. The lone exception was one newspaper article in the *Iowa State Daily* about women’s groups that assist rape survivors. In fact, in the hierarchy of oppression, privilege was maintained: men over women, race over rape, White over Black.

There was no overt challenge to the blatant racist and sexist mythologies and stereotypes that were revived on campus and in the media regarding this situation. Rather, the mythologies surrounding racism and sexism remained secure because of the silence that enveloped the case. Once Robb’s case was “solved,” it was no longer a newsworthy event. Although the microcontext case was solved, there was no conclusion to the macrocontext myths that remained alive, even after the crime proved false.

Furthermore, because the campus police waited an entire day to release the information about the “assailants” to the university and Ames, Iowa, community, suggesting that there was little or no urgency in releasing the information, why was the vague description of “four Black men” released at all? The “assailants” could have driven a thousand miles from the campus during that time. Would the campus police have taken such extraordinary measures if Robb had been attacked by four White men, all more than 6 feet tall, brandishing weapons, and driving a Honda or Toyota? Would her concocted story have become a regional media sensation? Based on Meyers’s (1997) study, what receives media coverage “is also a function of what police think [and the media thinks] should be covered” (p. 100). Reporters often rely on the police as the primary and legitimate source of information concerning the crime (p. 100). Not only do reporters have to rely on the police for information, but to facilitate this relationship, reporters have to restrict information that could harm the case. Unlike rape crisis centers or special interest groups, the police are viewed as unbiased by news workers (p. 91). However, workers at rape crisis centers frequently

cite the police as insensitive to the needs of rape victims, and minority communities often cite the actions of police as racist (p. 100). Although the reporters view their resources at the police department as unbiased, the stories that make the television or newspaper clearly reflect the views and opinions of the police and reporters (p. 92). The actions taken by ISU, campus police, and the media helped maintain macrocontext gender and race ideologies; the Black violent male brute attacking innocent White women still exists, and White women lie about being raped.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this microcontext case study was to critically examine the revival of mythology—in this case the myths surrounding a falsified claim of rape and race—in perpetuation of mythology and the support of the mythology through lack of challenges to it particularly at the macrocontext level. Our research clarified and made explicit taken-for-granted White supremacist, patriarchal, mythological frames that made African American men a hypervisible threat, rape survivors invisible, and women untrustworthy.

As with any study, there were limitations. First, this study was primarily a critical analysis of the measures that the media, police, and university took in dealing with a falsified rape charge that was largely underreported in mediated avenues other than the local paper and student newspaper. Second, a repeated study should be conducted to better understand if ideas regarding rape and race change with time. This is of particular importance because four additional cases of false sexual assault allegations have surfaced on the ISU campus since this 2001 incident.<sup>11</sup> Third, future studies could benefit from looking at multiple universities regarding issues of rape and race on their campuses because rape and race are not issues that only ISU has had to face. Finally, future studies could benefit from examining why it seems tolerable to use African American men as scapegoats for White criminality.

Issues of rape and race are a great concern for all campuses. Following the news that Robb falsified her report, there was no

apology by Robb, the media, ISU, or the campus police for perpetuating mythological stereotypes or for potentially creating stronger racial divides in the campus community. In addition, ISU failed to bring to light the fact that false rape reports are very rare but serve to further harm former or future rape victims. Institutions such as the media, universities, and campus police sanctify White patriarchal hegemonic hierarchies when investigating the “truth” is set aside in favor of the status quo.

## NOTES

1. White womanhood is a patriarchal notion that refers to the belief that White women need protection from society. This was once a rally cry of the KKK—to protect White women from the newly emancipated slaves. White womanhood also invokes one stereotypical notion of and one single meaning of feminine. According to Collins (1990), “in the cult of true womanhood, true women possessed four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Elite white women and those of the emerging middle class were encouraged to aspire to these virtues” (p. 71).

2. Statistical evidence regarding rape and race prior to the 1900s are unavailable. Many of the agencies that keep rape and race statistics were not around until the 1900s.

3. In 1931, the press was obsessed with the notorious Scottsboro Boys rape case. This case involved two White, poor, unemployed women who were riding the rails from Chattanooga to Memphis with other unemployed youth (nine of those youth happened to be Black). As soon as the train reached its destination, it was met by a gang of 75 White men already making accusations of rape. Both women stated they had been raped by all nine Black youth (one woman later recanted her story). All nine youths were convicted of rape; eight youths were given the death penalty, and the 13-year-old was given life in prison. After multiple trials, appeals, and time served, all the Scottsboro Boys eventually escaped or were paroled from prison. The last person was freed in 1951, and no one was executed (Linder, 1999).

4. The famous murder of Emmett Till in 1955 made mainstream media more aware of how Blacks were covered. Till, from Chicago, was in Money, Mississippi, visiting relatives, when he was forced into a car, pistol whipped, shot in the head, had a fan tied around his neck, and thrown into the Tallahatchie river for supposedly making a wolf whistle or saying “bye baby” to Carolyn Bryant, a White woman.

5. The 1964 rape and murder of Kitty Genovese, a White woman, by Winston Moseley, a Black man, did not change how women who were raped were covered in the press. Although her neighbors looked on, Kitty was stabbed several times and while she lay dying was raped. Although no one helped her, her case seemed to elicit the sympathy of the media and is often brought up when talking about the 1989/1990 Central Park jogger case.

6. The most famous interracial rape case was the 1989/1990 Central Park rape case and trial. A wealthy (investment banker) White female jogger was brutally raped, beaten with rocks and a lead pipe, and left for dead by four Black teens and one Latino teen. The news

media relied on old stereotypes of "Beauty and the Beasts" (Benedict, 1992, p. 194). Although the teens were convicted, the convictions were thrown out because there was no forensic evidence linking any of the men to her rape and assault. There was a DNA match with serial rapist Matias Reyes, who confessed to the jogger attack in 2002 (The African American Registry, 2002).

7. Currently, the most famous interracial rape case has been the 2003 Kobe Bryant case. Because the complainant declined to testify at the criminal hearing, the criminal charges against Bryant were dismissed. However, a settlement decision was reached during the civil trial. A large, undisclosed monetary settlement agreement was reached between the two parties. Bryant made a public apology to his complainant for his "behavior that night and for the consequences she has suffered" (MSNBC, 2005, para. 16) and insisted that the sexual encounter was consensual. Despite the settlement agreement and public apology, this case continued the historical stereotypes about Black men and White women, with the added complexity of celebrity.

8. The participant data for this project were collected during the summer 2003 semester. Thirty-eight students from ISU participated in this study, and of those, 17 were interviewed. All students filled out an online quantitative survey and demographic questionnaire. Student participants were 27 females and 11 males from the following colleges: College of Education and College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Years in attendance at Iowa State consisted of 2 first-year students, 13 attending two years, 10 attending three years, 7 attending four years, 3 attending six years, 1 attending seven years, and 2 for eight years. The age of the participants included 1 teen, 24 in their 20s, 6 in their 30s, 6 in their 40s, and 1 no response. The racial makeup of the participants was 3 African Americans, 1 Asian American, 31 Euro-Americans, 1 Native American, and 2 no comment. The demographics of those interviewed included the following: 8 graduate students, 6 seniors, 3 juniors; 12 women, 5 men; and 16 Euro-Americans and 1 Asian American.

Participants' perceptions of rape and race were assessed using an 18-item survey. Items about race focused on previous experiences and interactions with African Americans before and after the respondent enrolled in college. Respondents were asked, for example, "when it comes to your relationships with African Americans before you entered college, have they been positive?" Items about rape focused on individual's knowledge about and perception of rape victims. Respondents were asked, for example, "I know someone who has had a personal experience with rape." Responses were measured by a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, with the median response (4) indicating "no opinion." The quantitative survey data were analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences Analysis of Variance and Cell Means. An ANOVA test for variance was run examining differences in gender, race, and community.

However, because of the low number of participants as well as the lack of racial and ethnic diversity, data gathered from the quantitative questionnaire were not used in the study. However, the participant interview data were used. Although the student interviews cannot be generalized to all rape and race contexts because of small sample size, the student interview responses spoke to both micro- and macrocontext rape and race situations.

9. All student participants chose or were given an alias.

10. According to FindLaw for the Public (2005b), sexual assault laws vary by state, but sexual assault generally refers to any crime in which the offender subjects the victim to sexual touching that is unwanted and offensive. These crimes can range from sexual groping or assault/battery, to attempted rape. The crime of rape (or "first-degree sexual assault" in some states) generally refers to nonconsensual sexual intercourse that is committed by

physical force, threat of injury, or other duress. A lack of consent can include the victim's inability to say "no" to intercourse, due to the effects of drugs or alcohol. Rape can occur when the offender and victim have a pre-existing relationship (sometimes called "date rape"), or even when the offender is the victim's spouse.

Stein (2000) noted that "there is no such offense as 'rape' under Iowa law. The term sexual abuse includes a broader definition of offenses than what is known commonly as 'rape'; the terms are not interchangeable" (Appendix A, para. 7; see also FindLaw for the Public, 2005a).

11. More current cases of false sexual assault allegations: In January 2003, Sara Palmersheim falsely claimed a man broke into her apartment through a window and sexually assaulted her (Kristufek, 2003, para. 3); in September 2003, Cindy Schuster-Villafane falsely accused an acquaintance of sexual assault (Sederstrom, 2003a, para. 1); in October 2003, Christine Williams falsely reported being stalked by a male friend (Sederstrom, 2003c, para. 1); and in October 2003, Jesse Stephenson falsely reported that three to four White males physically assaulted him (Sederstrom, 2003b, para. 1).

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