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"Nobody Cared Because It Was Happening to Black Women": A Qualitative Study of the Black Man's Perspective on the Sexual Assault/Sexual Violence of Black Women

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Robert Kelly (R. Kelly) is a critically acclaimed R&B (rhythm and blues) singer, songwriter, and producer. Over the years of his career, allegations of sexual violence/sexual assault (SV/SA) were ignored or swept under the rug. It was not until early January of 2019, the television network Lifetime, released a six-part docuseries called, “Surviving R. Kelly.” Within the docuseries, Black women rehashed their survival stories of the sexual misconduct between them and R. Kelly. It shook the Black community and began to uncover and dredge up the horrifying history of SV/SA. Upon closer inspection of the docuseries, many of the men in R. Kelly’s inner circle knew about his indiscretions but did nothing to stop R. Kelly’s behavior. This qualitative study uses the Lifetime docuseries, “Surviving R. Kelly,” to understand to reveal how Black men perceive SV/SA of Black women.

This qualitative research study attempts to shed light on three aims. The first aim is to describe conversations that Black men have had around SV/SA of Black women prompted by the Surviving R. Kelly series. The second aim is to understand the role of Black female influence on Black masculinity and the treatment of Black women. The third aim is to identify potential barriers that Black men have had in protecting Black women. Twelve Black men, in the Metropolitan area, were interviewed. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 60 minutes and explored a variety of domains. These domains included their perceptions of the docuseries to their experiences with intervening with SV/SA. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results demonstrate that Black men are willing to discuss SV/SA and a need for increased programming to give tools to Black men to help them navigate prevention. These findings are important to consideration for future public health interventions, programs and policies.

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Introduction

In the United States, one in three women will experience sexual assault (SA) or sexual violence (SV) in their Lifetime, with a lesser-known statistic of one in six men experiencing rape in their Lifetime.(Control, 2010) According to a 2014 CDC Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report, the rate of reported SV is higher among African American/Black women compared to their white counterparts; with almost 21% of black women reporting having experienced rape in their lifetime.(Control, 2014) However, reviewed literature has demonstrated that women underreport their SV/SA. A large number of African American women fail to disclose SV/SA, particularly when a perpetrator is an African American man.(Tillman et al., 2010) To give women the space to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual abuse and assault in society, Tarana Burke started the #MeToo Movement in 2006.

Tarana Burke, a black woman, began the #MeToo Movement almost a decade ago on MySpace.(Harris, 2018) She wanted to give women, particularly black women, who had survived SV/SA and other forms of violence, the space to speak out with the support of other survivors. Tarana said in an interview that, "SV is not about sex right...it's about power, and it is about the abuse of power." (Harris, 2018) The movement caught the spotlight when actress Rose McGowan accused celebrity film producer Harvey Weinstein of SV/SA. (Harris, 2018) One of the most striking allegations that came forth during the #MeToo Movement was that of Robert Kelly, also known as R. Kelly, who abused his celebrity status to take advantage of Black women who were trying to get into the music industry.

R. Kelly is a multi-million dollar recording artist, producer, and songwriter, who has worked with the likes of Michael Jackson, Celine Dion, and Jay Z. However, his best-kept secret,

concealed by his fame, was brought to light when the docuseries “Surviving R. Kelly” premiered on Lifetime early January 2019. R. Kelly, for the past two decades, managed to sexually assault, rape, and enslave over a dozen Black women and girls.(Lifetime, 2018) In the Lifetime docuseries, one line, paraphrased, stood out the most: “All noticed, but nobody cared because they were Black girls.” (Lifetime, 2018) This docuseries shook the Black community. It began to uncover and dredge up the horrifying history of SV/SA, particularly against Black women and girls, within the black community. Furthermore, it brought up the question, why now? Moreover, who is responsible for the protection of black women/girls?

Within the black community, there is a stigma associated with reporting SV/SA, which in turn affects the health and well-being of Black women and the Black community. There are several reasons this stigma exists, all of which compound upon one another. To the individual black woman, research has shown that those who have experienced SV/SA within their Lifetime are at a higher risk of substance abuse, this can include marijuana, alcohol and other illicit drugs. (Jina & Thomas, 2013; Tillman et al., 2010; West, 2014) They can also experience high rates of psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), low-self-esteem, suicide ideation/attempts, and much more.(Jina & Thomas, 2013; Tillman et al., 2010; West, 2014) women are also are more likely to experience physical health issues that range from hypertension to increased risky sexual behavior that leads to poor sexual health.(Jina & Thomas, 2013; Tillman et al., 2010; West, 2014) Risky sexual behavior can include unintended pregnancies accompanied by abortions, increased sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV/AIDs, increased sexual partners and participating in transactional sex all under the influence of substances.(Jina & Thomas, 2013; Tillman et al., 2010; West, 2014) To make matters worse the all of these factors can lead to the revictimization of SV/SA.(Jina & Thomas, 2013; Tillman

et al., 2010; West, 2014) The underreporting of SV/SA is also connected to societal and community views. Available evidence points towards the historically harsh treatment of African Americans by society and the criminal justice system which cause the Black community and Black women to feel that they always are the target.(Patton & Snyder-Yuly, 2017)

Within the Black community, many black women who are survivors of SV/SA speak of stories where they were told to keep quiet or told that it would be dealt "in house" (i.e., within the Black community).(Chapter 27. *Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World | Section 3. Healing from the Effects of Internalized Oppression | Main Section | Community Tool Box*) This reluctant response is an example of internalized oppression. Internalized oppression is when people in the same group believe (often unconsciously) the misinformation and stereotypes that society communicates about other members of their group.(Chapter 27. *Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World | Section 3. Healing from the Effects of Internalized Oppression | Main Section | Community Tool Box*) In the case of SV/SA within the black community, internalized oppression is detrimental to achieving justice. Internalized oppression has led to the protection of individuals that cause harm because of their value to the community. Although men that are perpetrators of SV/SA pose significant harm, they are keystones to the community, providers to families, fathers to children, and husbands to wives. This is detrimental when historically, slave families were consistently torn apart by slave masters and plantation owners. Thus, to see Black men prosecuted and thrown in jail would leave an already historically weakened community infrastructure in shambles. Thus, for the Black woman, internalized oppression feels more like an "allegiance" to the Black man. Where historically, Black men have been prosecuted and lynched from false accusations of SV/SA of white women, so to a system that outrightly provides no justice to Black men, why would a black woman add on to that torment?(León, 2019; Tillman et

al., 2010) The internalized oppression of Black women has led to a cycle of abuse, SV/SA, and other forms of violence, that would have never been spoken upon that was brought to light when the #MeToo Movement caught steam.

Purpose

This study uses “Surviving R. Kelly” to attempt to address how to include men into the discourse of SV/SA among the Black community. Using qualitative methods, the aims of this study are:

- 1) To use “Surviving R. Kelly, to unveil the conversations that Black men have had around SV/SA of Black women
- 2) To understand the impact that female influence has on Black masculinity, specifically in the perception of black women.
- 3) What are the potential barriers that Black men have had in protecting Black women?

Literature Review

Sexual Violence/Sexual Assault of Black Women

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) sexual violence (SV) includes five types of violence: rape, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, and non-contact unwanted sexual experiences. (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2019) Contact sexual violence (SV) is a combined measure that includes rape, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact. (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2019) According to the NISVS data brief released November 2018, it states that one in four women have experienced completed sexual violence in her Lifetime. (Smith et al., 2018) Upon closer examination, survivors of completed and or attempted SV, 81.3% have experienced SV before the age of 25. About half 43.2% have experienced SV before the age of 18, 30.5% between the ages of 11-17 and 12.7% at the age of 10 or younger. (Smith et al., 2018) These numbers are astonishing; however, the statistics do not differentiate between women of different color and ethnicities. Previous research has shown that black women are more likely to experience higher rates of sexual assault and sexual violence. (Basile, 2016) According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NVRC) Report published in 2016, key findings suggested that of a sample of 168 women, 53% indicated rape victimization, and 44% reported sexual coercion within their Lifetime, with approximately 42% reporting to have experienced both. (Basile et al., 2016; Basile, 2016) When asked about the age of their sexual victimization, 73% of women were victimized before the age of 18. (Basile et al., 2016; Basile, 2016) In understanding the race of the perpetrator over 96% of women stated that they were of the same race. (Basile et al., 2016)

Robert Kelly (R. Kelly) and Surviving R. Kelly

Robert Kelly (R. Kelly) is a critically acclaimed R&B (rhythm and blues) singer, songwriter, and producer. He was born January of 1967 and is one of five children raised by a single mother on the southside of Chicago.(R. Kelly, 2012) He began his reign in R&B in 1990 when he signed a contract in the early 1990s; from that point, he was unstoppable. Within his music career, R. Kelly released some of the world's classics from "Ignition Remix," a club favorite, "I Believe I Can Fly" from the Space Jam album, and "Step in the Name of Love."(R. Kelly, 2012) He has worked with some of the greatest known artists such as Michael Jackson on "You Are Not Alone," Celine Dion on "I'm Your Angel," and Whitney Houston on "I Look To You."(R. Kelly, 2012) Due to his continued success, he became known as the King of R&B music. Any song or album that he "touched" would top the billboards and could be heard from clubs to churches. However, his career has been nothing but perfect; beginning in 1994, rumors of his sexual misconduct began to surface.(Fortin, 2018)

R. Kelly's sexual misconduct arose when he signed with teenage singer Aaliyah who released the song and titled album in 1994 "Age Ain't Nothing But a Number." However, speculations began to surface was R. Kelly, at the time 27 and Aaliyah, 15, were in an intimate sexual relationship.(Cobb, 2019; Tribune, 2019) There were speculations that a secret marriage between R. Kelly and Aaliyah, who claimed she was 18.(Fortin, 2019) They annulled the marriage several years later. Sadly, Aaliyah died from a tragic plane crash in August 2001.(Tribune, 2019). Over the next several years, R. Kelly is publicized in the news fighting and settling various sexual misconduct trials and accusations. By early 2000, a sex tape emerged of R. Kelly urinating in the mouth of a young black teenage girl.(Cobb, 2019) This tape circulated throughout various forms of media. He was arrested and charged with child

pornography, where the trial takes place in 2008, where he is acquitted of all charges. In the ensuing years, R. Kelly is again charged and acquitted of various child pornography allegations.

Through these various allegations, R. Kelly received assorted accolades from BET (Black Entertainment Television), the NAACP, and many more. His sex-tape becomes a joke within media, to the point where it becomes a sketch on the Dave Chappelle show.(Cobb, 2019; HILL, 019) In 2017, Buzzfeed News Report released an article about parents claiming that their daughters are being held hostage by R. Kelly.(DeRogatis, 2017) This exposé began the major downfall of R. Kelly, the person, and his influence on music. To bring even more light to the situation, Lifetime released their docuseries, Surviving R. Kelly, in January of 2019, amid the #MeToo Movement and other sexual violence protests.(Fortin, 2019; Lifetime, 2018) The docuseries is a six-part series that previewed over three days that included immoral accounts from women that were sexually abused by R. Kelly.(Cobb, 2019; Lifetime, 2018) This docuseries tore the country apart, particularly the Black community, from those that believed the women and others that defended R. Kelly. This docuseries set the stage for many a conversation. Many people, from celebrities he worked with, his managers, and his security and others knew about his relations with underage women, but no one stepped in to stop his acts.(Beaumont-Thomas, 2019)

Bystander Effect and Men

For years, many knew about R. Kelly's indiscretions with young black women and girls, but within his circles, no one never spoke up and brought the situation to light. The lack of response to or action on the allegations is a classic example of the bystander effect. Bibb Latané and John Darley, two social psychologists, found the concept intriguing after the murder of a

young white woman named Kitty Genovese. In New York City in March of 1964, Kitty was murdered a mere few yards outside of her apartment. (Schroeder, 2012) There were 38 accounts from different witnesses that all heard her, but only one called the police, and she died on site. (Schroeder, 2012) Latané and Darley eventually came up with a model called the Stages of Helping that frame the points in which people choose or not choose to help in both emergency and non-emergency situations. There are four parts to the Stages of Helping, noticing, interpreting the emergency, assuming the responsibility, and knowing the appropriate form of assistance. (Latané & Darley, 1970; Schroeder, 2012)

The concept of the bystander effect has been the key to forming various bystander interventions, particularly concerning sexual assault and sexual violence of women. Since its inception of bystander intervention programs in the late 1980s, these programs are implemented in high schools, colleges, and workplaces. (Latané & Darley, 1970) Although they are meant to harness everyone's accountability in sexual assault and violent situations, there are several that specifically target men. A recent literature review conducted by Wright et al., 2018, examined interventions that assessed the effectiveness of bystander interventions targeted towards college-aged men. Only 29 studies were found to be specific to men and not include women. (Wright et al., 2018) After an analysis of these studies, there were several outcomes found to be small, stable, and significant effects. These outcomes were improving rape attitudes, reducing rape tendencies, reduced intention to engage in sexually aggressive acts in the future, and engaging in the prevention of sexual assault behaviors. (Wright et al., 2018) Wright et al. did find that gender-specific programs among college-aged students were more effective in prevention behaviors. (Wright et al., 2018) A significant example is one of the most popular intervention programs called the Green Dot program. The Green Dot program is a college-based intervention

program that uses empathy-based tactics to help young men understand the emotional trauma that women experience in SV/SA.(Coker et al., 2011; Stewart, 2014) In the training, the men were taught to understand various masculinities, SV/SA trauma, and lastly, they developed bystander strategies on an individual and institutional level.(Stewart, 2014) By the end of the training, the young men involved showed that they were more apt to confront sexism and challenge sexual assault. Overall giving the men tools to challenge harmful SV/SA ideologies encourages them to stand up and act up.(Coker et al., 2011; Stewart, 2014) However based on the meta-analysis of bystander programs they found that although there were significant attitude changes the rate of incidences of sexual assault still stayed the same.(Wright et al., 2018)

History of SV/SA with Black Women and the Bystander Effect

Black woman has been excluded and ignored from the conversation of SV for centuries, to the detriment of their protection and voice to speak up and be heard. Throughout history starting with slavery, black women are used as tools just for their bodies and procreation by white slave owners.(Broussard, 2013; Davis, 2003; West & Johnson, 2013) As rape laws came to be in the 19th century, black women were excluded, and it was not considered illegal to rape a black woman, nor were black men able to protect black women from such heinous crimes as it was a risk to their lives.(Broussard, 2013) This lack of protection from the law dehumanized black women much to their detriment.

In the 20th century, the protection of black women had not improved. A significant example by Katz et al., of this is a recent study that used the Social Categorization Theory to determine if white women were more likely to intervene as a bystander when a black woman was at risk for SV.(Katz et al., 2017; Turner et al., 1987) This study presented the same scenario of

an individual who was at risk for SV at a party. The control group had a racially neutral name, while the intervention group had a distinctively black name. Overall, the group that had the distinctively black name reported less intent to intervene than those with the racially ambiguous name.(Katz et al., 2017) The participants felt personally less responsible for intervening and perceived that black women were more likely to experience pleasure within the intervention scenario than the control scenario.(Katz et al., 2017)These feelings play into the racial tensions that Black women endure. One would think that through the shared experiences of being a woman, white women would be more likely to intervene. It also demonstrates that Black women are at higher risk of SV/SA compared to their white counterparts.

So, what can be done to increase the protection of the black woman against individual rates of SV? One solution can be concerning black men and their bystander effect. Although the previous meta-analysis stated that bystander interventions of black men did not change rates of incidences of sexual assault, programs need to begin to look at more culturally competent intervention to assist black men. Findings from this study hope to inform the barriers as a black man to protecting black women from SV.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical approaches are mainly used to understand the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of sexual assault and sexual violence on women and particularly Black women. For example, an article by Rebecca Campbell et al., 2009 uses an ecological model to map out the impact through multiple levels for women. However, a lack of literature on the theoretical discourse of Black men and their influence in the prevention of sexual assault. This

study aims to use a framework approach to help give an overview of the study design and also the way in which Black men discuss SV/SA and their part in the prevention.

According to Merriam Webster, masculinity is defined as the quality, state, or degree of being masculine or manly.(n.d.) Another way in which to view masculinity is in opposition to femininity, or anything that can be considered “soft,” which can include as anything from showing emotions, caring, vulnerably, and much more. Society does its part in continuing to perpetuate masculinity, mainly a Black man's masculinity is even more likely to be under extreme scrutiny. However, one cannot discuss Black masculinity without understanding the historical impact of how it came to be.

Historically, Black masculinity traces back to pre-slavery times. Within the African continent, the tribes would have rituals that consisted of physical and intellectual skills that would signify that the young boy was now a man.(Pierre et al., 2001) These rituals would teach the young boys characteristics to be a man in their community, such as providing through farming and hunting, how to be the head of the household, strength, ownership, perseverance, and discipline. (Pierre et al., 2001) This tradition was unrooted and stripped away with the movement of Africans to the Americas to become slaves. These once strong African men were now made to be slaves, in which their bodies no longer belonged to them. The pillars of manhood in which they learned through their motherlands were stripped as they saw their families forcefully sexually abused separated and sold to slave and plantation owners.(Pierre et al., 2001)

Through all the historical context, Black men were and are still able to keep their taught masculinity at the forefront. Protection, provision, and strength are concepts that Black men hold

their manhood. In using the R. Kelly docuseries, the qualitative study uses masculinity to construct the questions used to be a conversation about SV/SA to Black women.

Methods

Introduction

This qualitative study explored African American/Black men's thoughts and feelings on the R. Kelly docuseries, "Surviving R. Kelly," and the sexual assault/sexual violence against African American/Black women. Thus, the best method of data collection that allowed rich descriptive stories was semi-structured interviews that took place over the Atlanta Georgia Metropolitan Area. The feasibility of this study was determined through a pilot of three interviews was completed in a Qualitative Analysis Course (Behavioral Sciences and Health Education 538) at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University. This study also underwent review by the Emory University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and, based upon all study materials and procedures, was approved and deemed exempt.

Funding

This study received funding by LaDawna Jones-Rowell, MPH, who donated \$250. The funding was used to pay participants through an electronic Amazon gift card and transcription costs through Temi.

Population & Sample

Participants for this study were Black/African American men that identified as male, between the ages of 23 – 38, African American/Black located in the southeast or southwest region of the United States. The participants had to be English speaking and must have watched all or at least two-thirds of the Lifetime docuseries, "Surviving R. Kelly," that aired in January of

2019. If the interested participant did not fulfill these criteria, then they were excluded from this study.

Setting

The study took place in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area within the I-85 highway bounds. The participants had the option to choose a location that was convenient for them as long as it was semi-quiet and not at the participant's home residence, for the safety of the participant and the primary investigator.

Eligibility & Recruitment

Using snowball and convenience sampling, a flyer, or a script, that contained the PI's google voice number and Emory University email was posted on various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, GroupMe. The flyer was distributed to individuals that participated in the study, friends, and acquaintances of the PI. With the help of a local community partner, a few participants were recruited through a local tattoo parlor in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. Participants were eligible if they were between the ages of 23 to 38 and had watched at least 2/3 or 4 of the Lifetime docuseries "Surviving R. Kelly." Any of the participants that did not fulfill these requirements were not recruited for this study.

Field Methods

For all participants interested in the study, each was screened twice for eligibility. The first screening occurred when the participant initially contacted the researcher, and the second before the interview was conducted. Both times the participant was asked about their age and if

they watched at least two-thirds of the Lifetime docuseries, "Surviving R. Kelly." The PI and the participant scheduled a date time and place that the interviews were to take place. Interviews took place in public settings, like coffee shops, around the Metropolitan area. This measure was to ensure both the safety of the participant as well as the PI.

When the PI and participant met for the interview, the participant was given a consent form to read, sign, and date. The participants were asked if they have any questions throughout the consent form. The PI reviewed the purpose of the study as well as the eligibility requirements with the participant. Through verbal assent, the participants were informed that they would be participating in a single, one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interview that would be audio recorded, completely anonymous, and confidential. The interviews were recorded and stored on a password and biometrically protected device. At the completion of the interview, participants were emailed an electronic Amazon gift card to Amazon valued at \$10 as appreciation for their time. Overall, 12 interviews were recorded and transcribed via Temi, an online transcription service. The interviews were quality checked by the Primary Investigator (PI), who went through each transcription verbatim, made memos, and reflected upon each experience. All data was stored on the PI's password-protected devices as well as an Emory University Box Drive.

Interview Guide

The participants participated in a single, one on one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews ranging from 21:07 to 01:03:48. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions each with probes, allowing the participants and the researcher the opportunity to explore their thoughts and provide a detailed and thick description in their responses. The interview guide begins with a verbal consent script, which then proceeds to the participants' thoughts and feelings about R.

Kelly. The interview guide flows into how the conversation about the R. Kelly docuseries has evolved in their various social settings, from peers to family and friends. It then continues to their taught history of black masculinity and their female influences present in their lives. Finally, the guide concludes with their thoughts on R. Kelly's music career as well as anything else that they would like to add to the discussion. The interviews were recorded via Apple Voice Memos Application on the researcher's password-protected iPhone 7plus as well as on the PI's iPad-Pro 11. A transcription service, Temi, was used to transcribe, quality check, and deidentify all interviews. The transcriptions were downloaded and stored on the PI password and biometrically protected device. A copy of the interview guide is located at ([Appendix A](#)).

Analysis

By using inductive and deductive methods, a codebook was created. Deductive codes were focused on questions that the interview guide asked. Inductive codes were found from the data. For example, one question based on a quote said in the docuseries; this deductive code was called "Quote." From this deductive code, an inductive sub-code was created called the "black community." This code captures what participants are observing in the Black community concerning that quote. Exclusion and inclusion criteria were established for codes and were categorized as principal codes or sub-codes. The codebook and transcripts were then loaded in MAXQDA 2018, and transcripts were labeled by interview number (i.e., "Interview #"). The transcriptions were coded by the PI only. As the PI coded, there was a constant iterative process. The PI went back into the already coded interviews and recoded segments. A code summary was derived, and the broader themes were analyzed from the codes. A copy of the code book is located at ([Appendix B](#)).

Results

This chapter provides the analysis of 12 interviews with Black men, ages 23 to 37, around the Metro Atlanta Area. The findings of this study are organized into four themes: 1) the Black men's reactions to the R. Kelly docuseries, 2) the conversations that Black men have had with people around them about the docuseries, 3) how the men were taught about masculinity, and 4) what are the perceptions of protection for black women.

Reactions to “Surviving R. Kelly”

The following are revelations that the men had once watching the docuseries. They specifically spoke around the common knowledge of R. Kelly's indiscretions, the time that it took for the women to come forth and lastly the accountability of R. Kelly's circles.

“Just, um, just regular news and of course....It was almost common knowledge. “

Justin (*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

The R. Kelly docuseries was a revelation for all men during the interviews. When asked what they knew or learned from the docuseries, their responses were somewhat similar. Roman, who is 24 and a recent college graduate, speaks on what he already knew about R. Kelly and his history.

Well, you know, I knew about the, the case. What was it that he had? Early two thousands, um, the video of him, uh, urinating on that uhm girl in the video, which is very old. But um, yeah, that's pretty much it from before the documentary he got off. (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

Some of the men spoke about how much public knew about R. Kelly's indiscretions with young black girls. R. Kelly's most famous being illegal marriage with Aaliyah, a young Rhythm

and Blues (R&B) singer. They also brought up the sex tape of R. Kelly urinating on a young girl. Aaron, a 25-year-old, spoke on the way in which he knew about the R. Kelly sex tape even at a young age. “Uh, cause I know growing up it was always the butt of a joke. I kinda think like, uh, going through elementary school. you got Boondocks, you got Dave Chappelle, they all turned into a joke, but even then did anything happen....No.” Aaron (*Personal Communication, October 2019*) The docuseries brought to light the extent of R. Kelly’s abuse; it not only shocked the men, but it revealed that they did not understand the number of girls had fallen prey to R. Kelly.

“I definitely believe their stories...like why now?” Paul (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

When asked about their reactions to the women’s stories, no one had doubted that they were false. However, they wondered why the women decided to come forward now. A pattern began to emerge as some of the men spoke. Many of them unveiled that they know or have known women who are survivors of sexual violence or sexual assault (SV/SA). Pete, a 28-year-old male, is an example of this. He speaks about how he was able to relate to the women in the series. Due to the stories that he has heard from women in his life, he was able to understand the fight for one’s life and the turmoil that it can cause a woman.

And a lot of times what I've learned from some of the victims that I've interacted with is blocking a lot of that out as the only way you can survive without seeing and being fearful in every step you take. So, for me, it [the docuseries] hit home. It was very emotional because I know people that have been through it and, um, I was actually just glad that some of them have the ability to finally step up and talk about it. Pete (*Personal Communication, July 2019*)

Just like Pete, many were able to empathize with these women in the docuseries. They grappled with the complexities of coming forth as a survivor of SV/SA, and the repercussions that follow coming forward.

“So many people were complicit...and aware of what was going on” Luke (*Personal Communication, July 2019*)

One of the surprising themes that arose from the interviews was the topic of accountability. So many of the men noted that the people closest to R. Kelly not only “fed” his behavior but also stood back and did nothing. Four of the men brought up the complicit behavior of the those in R. Kelly’s circles from the docuseries. They said that the accomplices to R. Kelly are just as guilty. For example, Paul, a 31-year-old male that works as an Atlanta tattoo artist, explained:

To me it was like a lot of people just trying to cover up the whole situation and like a little, a lot of people covering their ass cause all them knew about it. So, you just as guilty as him in my eyes, like his manager was covering for him. So, it's almost the same as you had sex with them females and you comin' for another nigga that had sex with underage females and it's the same shit. You just guilty other than that, I don't know... (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

During the interviews the men were asked to dive deeper into what could have kept those around the pop singer complacent. 24-year-old graduate student, Ben, spoke on what he believed was the main factor for this complacency. He explained, “I would say that the people who were close to R Kelly were putting their own personal gains over what was morally right to do.” (*Personal Communication, September 2019*) Additionally the men spoke of money, fame, and power as influences of R. Kelly’s circle. This was emphasized by Luke, 26 years of age, “...like

you hear like men of power...they do things that they know they shouldn't be doing just because they can and...it's easy and accessible for them.” (*Personal Communication, July 2019*) Pete and Ben brought up historical factors of how Black people are loyal to people in their community sometimes to a fault. This protection has become a problem to Black community specifically within Black households and comes at an extreme cost. Their comments about protecting their own brought about another theme that that played into accountability called “bringing the black man down.” Pete described this narrative as, “another successful black man that's being attacked by the system because they don't want us to get out of the poverty that we've historically been in...” Pete (*Personal Communication, July 2019*) On the contrary, for some men this narrative did not matter. For example, Ben was furious at the lack of agency that the men closest to R. Kelly exhibited; he gave no leeway for their actions and behaviors.

When it comes to the men, they just pissed me off 'cause they had the privilege of, of being in space, in a space where they could control it, where they could speak up. I don't think the women could speak up as well as the men could. Um, I don't think the women could advocate as well as the men could've, on their behalf... I see every man is complicit in that cycle of abuse. Like there, there's no excuse for them to be able to sit there and talk about it and say that they witnessed all these things and for them to have never said or done anything, period.

(*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

When it comes to the women that experienced SV/SA, having allies that can speak out and come to your rescue in spaces when you cannot be of high importance. R. Kelly's circle of complacency and privilege caused hurt and trauma to the young women and girls.

Conversations with Men and Women

The docuseries brought the conversation of SV/SA to the forefront between Black men and women. For the Black men, their conversations with one another were quite simple and lacked an emotional connection. On the other hand, their conversations with Black women addressed past experiences with SV/SA that Black women have survived. This began the turning point, this shifted not only the way in which the men interacted with Black women.

“We knew he's been trash” Luke (*Personal Communication, July 2019*)

The men described their conversations with other Black men about R. Kelly. Some caused intense conversations others were passive, some joked, and some just agreed with one another and left it at that. Some of the men were adamant to bringing up R. Kelly in their conversations with one another. Paul shared how he made sure that he and his friends had conversations about R. Kelly. “Oh we definitely going to talk about it. It's R. Kelly. You have to talk about it. And every person that I know says the same thing. Like, Oh, he need to go to jail there's no arguing against it...” (*Personal Communication, August 2019*) He further explained that he and his friends have kids, and being able to protect your children is of great importance to them.

Within the men’s conversations, if anyone decided to side with R. Kelly, it was a point of contention for them. They refused to have someone in their circle who sided with the behaviors and actions of R. Kelly. On the other hand, some men reported that jokes were made about not only about the women but also at Aaliyah even though the men knew the seriousness of the situation. Justin, who is 37, spoke about how his friend joked around would have been ready to risk it all for the young Black singer. When asked about the joke he responded,

...and “he was like, yeah, I probably would have taken that L for Aaliyah too, but he has joking (he laughs)...[I mean she's pretty, she's obviously a gorgeous girl and she was, um, a famous singer. So, you know, that's a great combo. (*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

Black men and their discussions with Black women were similar in their disdain for R. Kelly, but the reactions were starkly different than that of their male friends. The women around them were emotional and empathetic. The men stated that the women had more negative reactions to the docuseries. John, 26 years old, describes what he thought the tears of the women around him were coming from.

“I think that tears was from the... girls and how they were just pulling out their emotions and stuff. And, you know, girls have that type of connection that y'all can feel one another's emotions and through the screen as it, must be real.” (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

The ability to empathize with these women in the docuseries brought the stories closer to the men. These emotional responses around the R. Kelly Docuseries led to the men becoming more aware of various sexual assault experiences to women that they have interacted with.

“It was really a mind opener for me” Pete (*Personal Communication, July 2019*)

This docuseries raised awareness of SV/SA for the men. It allowed the Black men to have more in-depth discussions with their peers specifically, black women. For them the women in the docuseries and brought about meaning and sensitivity around the SV/SA. This It inspired and caused Black men to sit down and listen, as well as forgo assumptions, such as fear or the fact that the young girls were on the hunt for fame and money. Many saw Black women take this the hardest and began to understand that this was something that many Black women in their lives had experienced. All of the Black men were shocked at the sheer number of women who experience SV/SA. Justin spoke about how he learned to understand the fear and the way in

which coming forth with stories of SV/SA can trigger memories. He explains the shock he had when he learned that an older woman, he knew was recently sexually harassed at her workplace.

Oh my God, um, this girl, they'd tell me yesterday that she was harassed at work and um, this guy like whipped his junk out at work and asked her to give him head and, and I was like, I'm like, what? Like, like she didn't sound like she didn't... that she felt unsafe. She just told them like. 'Hey, I don't know what you think this is' and he just put his shit away and left the room.

But she handled it well. Justin (*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

His shock at the way in which SV/SA is prevalent in the everyday lives of Black women. It was obvious how prevalent in the everyday lives of Black women SV/SA is perpetuated. So much so that the women in these men's lives struggle to feel safe in their day to day lives.

Masculinity

When it comes to protection of Black women, it is important to understand the personal history of Black men and their connection with Black women. By taking a look at how men were taught about masculinity/manhood from women, one is then able to contextualize what protection can be from the Black men. The Black women in these men's lives still hold a significant place in the way in which they grasp concepts of Black masculinity/manhood. All of the men were surrounded by Black women and learned to appreciate and value the Black woman's input in their lives.

“Stroke, the ego and shit like that.” Paul (Personal Communication, August 2019)

There were several key themes that the men brought up about their treatment of black women and the connection to manhood/masculinity, the first being what they should tell Black women. The men were told to show women respect, love and flattery. Two of the men shared

that their mothers had taught them that you should flatter a woman, even if she is not so “good looking”. Roman was told by his mother to tell his little sister every day that she was beautiful, and even had a nickname that was given by him and his other brothers, “Pretty”, which they would say in a British accent. He explained,

When they're growing up, you need to, uh, build confidence within her. So, when she gets older, she won't be looking for it in different areas. She's already grown up knowing that she's beautiful. She can conquer or do whatever she wants to do in her life. And that's what my mother taught us to do with my sister. (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

Roman and some of the other men, found ways to build up Black women. The second theme that arose was the notion that women are not physically like men, rugged and tough. Pete speaks on how he was raised to treat Black women.

Um, but always, you know, I remember that that is a girl. She is not like you. She can't fight like your fight with you. You know, there's a lady, you have to treat her that way. She is a girl. You have to treat her that way. so, yeah. Pete (*Personal Communication, July 2019*)

These men were taught manners that could be considered perpetuating gender roles between the genders, they must be chivalrous, hold open doors for women, as well as protecting and providing for your family.

And then also like, you know, the old, old head kind of thing like, oh when you, when you're with a woman, you know, walk on the inside and have them walking outside. And then stuff like opening car doors and opening doors, holding in doors and stuff like that. Aaron (*Personal Communication, October 2019*)

Some of the men were raised by single mothers. For them the mothers was their provider, so they saw what it took for their mothers to provide the best life for them. However,

some of the men shared that their mothers felt that they could not teach them everything about what it mean to be a man and how to treat Black women. John describes the way in which his mother used a church mentoring program to teach him some the basics. In his church program, which met every day during the summer, he was taught how to go on dates with women and other methods of manhood/masculinity. “And sometimes they would have these things like, like, um, like fake dates and if you didn't do everything you're supposed to on the date.” (*Personal Communication, August 2019*) To this day he still uses those techniques that were taught to him. He is thankful that his mother did this for him.

Protection

The protection of black women can come in all forms. During the interviews, the men were asked about how difficult it was to protect women from situations that perpetuate SV/SA. The participant's responses ranged from easy to hard. Some of the men brought up their own experiences of preventing SV/SA with women they have encountered in their lives. Sometimes, the situations ended well -- others resulted in the local authorities intervening.

It was also important to understand what barriers prevent the men from intervening. During the interviews, all men were given two similar scenarios in which, after each one, they were asked the level of difficulty in which they were able to step in, how they would intervene, as well as the barriers that they could or would experience in protecting Black women. The first scenario was to see how the men intervened with friends. It went as follows: you are out with your friends, brunch or some other typical guy outing, and you see one of your guy friends begin to advance on a young Black woman. You observe that she is feeling uncomfortable, but it seems that your friend isn't letting up. The second scenario was very similar to the first however, the

person that is advancing on the young Black woman is a stranger. For both of these situations, there was no mention of alcohol or drugs, that was left up to the men. These scenarios allowed the men to think through their own behaviors.

“I'd be like, hey bro, she not feeling you....” Justin (*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

For the first scenario all the men with no hesitation said it was easy to step in. Many of them added alcohol as a factor for the scenario. One would think that being under the influence would have made intervening more difficult, however all of them still felt that stepping in was easy for them. An interesting factor was that some said that they would sit back and watch first to see the extent to which their friend was making the woman uncomfortable. Once they saw that the woman was visibly upset, they would go up and poke fun or tease their friend to bring a lighthearted feel or redirect their friend by telling them that she isn't that into him and lead him away. Aaron describes the manner in which he would step into the situation.

No, it's not hard at all. ... [to] check my friends like that. Because at this point, well to be honest, I'm not hanging around anybody that would be doing that. Cause that's the point. If I have to check my friends, then they're not my friends. Cause they know... They should know that, that, that that's not okay. So, it's not something that will be hard for me at all because ultimately, I try not to hang around people that are pieces of shit for the lack of a better word. So, if that's ever a situation that's happening and it's like, oh nah, you good, you got your, you're done. Go. That kind of thing. (*Personal Communication, October 2019*)

For this Aaron it was clear to see that for him, and many of the other men that behavior that makes a woman uncomfortable is unacceptable. He was adamant he didn't want people around him that can push or be willing to push those boundaries with Black woman. Paul also

believed in that sentiment, “I don't hang out with men who would do something like that. Like it probably wouldn't be my friend after that, honestly.” (*Personal Communication, August 2019*) In fact, throughout both of their interviews they related the situations back to the women in their families, or their friends' daughters and future daughter(s). For them their ease in being able to distance himself from perpetrators of SV/SA, however that is not every one of them.

Pete in his interview revealed that he is part of a fraternity. He spoke on his own experience with a fraternity, (frat) brother, Tarik, who is an overall good guy, however he behaves inappropriately towards Black women when intoxicated.

Yes, and he's not physically abusive. It's more of a verbal abusive and it's more of an like he's probably in his sober point, one of the nicest, most chivalrous men I know. He just, when he gets to drunk, he feels like he's communicating a lot better than he is. (*Personal Communication, July 2019*)

The situation becomes complicated when he, Tarik, and the rest of the frat bothers are out. Pete has intervened so much that the relationship between him and Tarik has become strained. Pete and his brothers have tried to talk to Tarik about his behavior, but he blatantly refuses to believe them. Pete has even tried to catch Tarik on tape for years and at this point he has given up and just asks his other frat bothers when to keep an eye out for Tarik.

This situation with Tarik poses a common scenario for Black men. However what happens when it is someone that they are dating? Roman opened up about how he was in a sexual relationship with a Black woman, and he did something that caused an emotional and mental trigger to his then girlfriend. He describes her reaction,

She just like broke down and started crying and everything I personally didn't understand, but she told me that, you know, was, um, sexually abused and her past relationship and it was

something that I did that, that triggered her so we can, that alone show me how traumatizing it can be. Um, dealing with, uh, that type of situation or being raped or not even just being sexually harassed in general can trigger, not, can trigger a lot of people obviously. (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

This was Roman's first time speaking about this situation. He spoke about the confusion and helplessness he felt in that moment. After gentle prodding, he explained to what he did in that moment to ensure that his girlfriend felt safe and secure.

Oh yeah. I walked over to her. I consoled her. I said, are you okay? I held her, you know, because in that type of situation, I don't really... There's really nothing you can say honestly to make them feel better. Except you know it's going to be okay. That's really all you can say. Especially if you yourself haven't experienced that or at least known somebody who had experienced that before. So yeah, I just sat there and then I held her in my arms. I let her, you know, let it all out. And then when she felt comfortable with the talk, that's when she told me everything. So, I felt like the best way to respond to negativity is with positivity. So.... I was really just trying to be encouraging to her about everything that happened and it's really, you can't tell somebody to, you know, let it go cause that's not something that you can just let go. "Roman (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

A negative reaction to her trigger could have torn down this Black woman even further, but he approached it with care a respect he was taught before. Some of the men did not have such stories but Justin, spoke after the interview about how he has noticed a shift in the way women behave with him on dates. For him, he never told any of his friends that he was on a date. However, for one Black woman he was dating noticed that she was texting her girlfriends about what he looks like, the car that he is driving, and even when the date was going longer than

expected the girls friends would call her to make sure that she was okay. From, that point on he was very aware of what women had to do to protect themselves when he felt that there was no threat.

His reaction to the situation could have been one to make or break her emotionally and mentally. The fact that this as his first time speaking about it also tells a lot about him as a person. He was asked if he had told anyone or gone to seek counseling and he said no. He was not going to tear down this young woman as it would not have benefited anyone. There was a stark comparison to the way in which the men would intervene when it was someone that they did not know.

“I know that I would at least have back up” Aaron (*Personal Communication, October 2019*)

For the men, there were several factors that played into intervening in the second scenario; some said it can be easy, while others said that it depended on what was around them. Roman discussed a recent situation he was in at a local Atlanta bar. He describes how he saw a young woman being harassed by a guy, and how he could see in her eyes and body language that she was uncomfortable but had no way out.

She just really did seem uncomfortable. So, I just walked over, and I just like put my arm around her and I was like, Hey, baby you okay? And then he just walked away. I said, I'm sorry I took so long in the bathroom and then she was like, Oh, thank you. And I was like, no problem. And just walked away. (*Personal Communication, August 2019*)

As a man, Roman also understands that other Black men will not overstep another man's girlfriend. He also emphasizes that stepping in does not need to be some dramatic gesture that leads to a fight. The men tried to keep it simple, yet it can still cause some problems. Ben spoke

about a situation in which he was at an Atlanta club. When he stepped after observing, it turned for the worse, and the man's anger focused on him.

Like, who the fuck do you think you are? Sorry, if I'm cursing, um, who the fuck do you think you are, she ain't saying nothing, This isn't none of your business, etc, etc. ...So I'd be like, you know what, you right, bro. That's on me and I turned around and be like, Hey, you want to go? And most likely you see yeah. And we can both walk away. There's no reason to escalate the situation. (*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

It was interesting to hear how he managed to walk away from this situation before it turned violent by not taking offence to other man's anger. This leads to the other factor that the men take into account when stepping into such situations: safety. Daniel speaks on the difficulty of stepping in, particularly with Georgia's gun laws.

That's where it becomes a little hard if I don't know the guy Um, then that's what becomes hard because don't know what this guy is capable of, especially in Georgia where everybody has guns and that's the first thing my mind goes to. It's like, Oh, this guy might be crazy. People shoot people for nothing. (*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

The fear is factor that the men have to battle against when intervening. For Aaron, those who were around him gave him the courage to step up. As for Ben, he brought a different spin to this conversation and that was the race of the offender and his willingness to intervene. While white men are easily intimidated by a Black man, Black men did not find another as threatening.

Um, if it's a white man, I am far more comfortable walking up to them and be like, this isn't your place. Get your hands off. Walk away. Okay. 'Cause I mean, this is where the stereotypes and stuff actually works in my favor. 'Cause then they're like, Oh, he's black. He can fight. I can't fight. But if I look like I can fight, they're gonna walk away. Does that make sense?

But if it's another black man, it's difficult because in this hyper masculine mindset, it's a, oh, he's challenging my manhood, therefore I have to escalate the situation and get buck and where to establish it. I'm not scared of him. And in that case, I am in far more danger than if it was somebody from another race. And they also kind of feel like they have the space to do this because they share this gender identity, not gender identity, this racial identity with this woman...I feel like they have more of a right to do what they're doing, whether it's right or not. Um, and in that case it's a little more difficult to convince them like, no, this, you have no rights to do this. (*Personal Communication, September 2019*)

His comment brings up a very different perspective. Ben was the only one of the 12 interviews to bring this forward. Overall, protection for Black women when it is someone that the men did not know was challenging; however, none of the men said that they would not be able to step forward.

Discussion

The research for this project was determined to answer three aims: 1. To use “Surviving R. Kelly, to unveil the conversations that Black men have had around SV/SA of Black women, 2. To understand the impact that female influence has on Black masculinity specifically in the perception of black women, and 3. What are the potential barriers that Black men have had in protecting Black women? The following are some key points derived from the research.

Masculinity

This study used Black masculinity as a framework to understand its role in SV/SA prevention. Masculinity was a focus in the interviews through discussions about participants' pasts and their journey to becoming men. Some of the men learned purely from the strong Black women around them or by watching critical male figures in their lives treat the Black women in their lives. The participants were given various lessons such as being a provider, a protector, and always to love the Black woman no matter the cost. One would think that this was a lesson that would translate over into their adult life, however, when they were presented with two situations, it was interesting to see how the Black men analyzed the situation before jumping in.

To step into situations where SV/SA is occurring can be seen as being soft or weak, and for the Black man, this can be detrimental. However, the situation in which they are stepping in can make all the difference. In the first scenario where the participant was with his friends and asked to stop his friend, the men found it easy to step in. They would use words or phrases like, "Yo, she's not that into you," or "let's go over here instead," many a time they knew that their guy friend would oblige and go with them. Perhaps how they approached their friend reduced embarrassment of seeing a girl reject their friend. This was also a low stakes game; these men

know one another and value their opinion of their friend on their character. However, in the second situation, this was not the same.

In the second situation, it was clear to see that many factors prevent Black men from stepping in. Many of the men said that they would not step into the situation without taking the time to analyze it. One said that he feared for his wellbeing, especially since one cannot tell how the person will respond to him. The men needed to have their guy friends around, that there was back up just in case. It also showed that the willingness to protect Black women was not as high as when they did not know the person. Overall, it is crucial to think about how masculinity is portrayed among Black individuals.

Theory

The framework that was chosen for this project initially was masculinity. However, it would bring value to use the social-ecological model as a means to unfold the complexities of bringing Black men into the discourse of SV/SA against Black women. The social-ecological model contains five levels, individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy, that can be used to think through this as a public health issue. The following explains how each level can be used to think about the issue holistically and also help to frame the interview guide.

The first level is the individual level of the social-ecological model. Within this level is an opportunity to take an in-depth look at the Black man; one can learn his attitude, knowledge, and his beliefs are on SV/SA. Questions found in the interview guide, specifically those that pertain to what where they taught about what it means to be a man or what they thought about the docuseries.

The next level would be interpersonal, and this would include one-on-one conversations with peers, family members, friends, or partners. These questions from the guide would be what have others taught them about masculinity or what have others discussed with them about the docuseries. They could also be questions on where they are asked if they have seen a shift in the way that Black women interact with them.

Next is the organizational level; here is an opportunity to discuss how their environments, which can be social or familial support circles, have discussed SV/SA. The interview guide speaks to this level of the social-ecological model through questions such as what they have heard about the docuseries from the women around them.

Then there is the community level, and this would include what Black men think are some cultural values of the Black community or the role that Black men play as a whole when it comes to SV/SA. From the literature, questions on internalized oppression would be of great importance. Some of the men in the interviews spoke about reporting as “taking the Black man down.” This narrative would be one to dive into understanding how men feel about how SV/SA cases are dealt with within the community. Which then leads to the final level, which is policy.

The policy level, this is looking at the laws and policies that are in place that either help or harm Black men in the fight against SV/SA. The interview guide that was used for this research study did not ask questions about the policies that exist, however, one of the participants did mention a situation in which he tried to help, and the law turned against him.

Overall the social-ecological model can be used to dissect how Black men can be brought into helping Black women fight SV/SA.

Support Through Shared Experiences

It was interesting to see a few of the men discuss that they did not feel connected with R. Kelly and the women that he hurt. This “not my monkey not my circus” mentality left Black women and girls in the crossfire when it came to R. Kelly. Due to the docuseries, the participants were shocked by the extent to which it affected the women around them. *Participant 10* spoke after the interview was over about how he was on a date with a woman, and she was texting her friends. He asked her what she has sent, and she explained that she had sent her friends his name and picture, the car he drove along with the license plate number, what she was wearing, and was also tracking her location. He, as a man, had never thought about what women have to go through to feel safe and protected. So, by bringing to attention shared experiences of SV/SA to Black men, it takes the mystery away from the issue and makes it personable.

It would also help that the Black men should speak to one another about what women are going through. Like, for example, *Participant 5* and his past partner, he did not speak to other men about what he experienced. He kept it quiet and carried it with him for years, and this study was the first time that he was letting someone know that this happened to him and her. Sharing these stories between one another can begin to break the cycle of SV/SA.

Protection & Its Various Forms

Protection is an interesting concept when it pertains to SV/SA. Black men within the interviews only thought of protection to be in the physical, like using their bodies as a method of blocking someone’s unwanted advances, or physically fighting for a woman when she cannot defend herself. After further analysis, there is rarely the thought of protection being emotional and present even in the spaces where black women are not present.

Emotional protection is a daunting concept and, if not handled properly, can lead to more trauma than the intended outcome of healing. Emotional protection can be from making sure that a Black woman's feelings and experiences are validated when those around her are not validating her. Black men historically are taught to find solutions to fix this can be by overshadowing the woman with their thoughts and opinions, or telling her that she should have used solution B instead of solution A. Prime examples of this can be from *participant 5* who comforted his past partner as she divulged a past SA/AV experience. In his situation, this could have been the moment in which he could have broken her down mentally and emotionally. However, he chose not to, he listened, and that, at times, is all a Black woman needs.

The other type of protection for Black women that was apparent is the protection when there are not Black women present in spaces where Black men meet, such as barbershops or gatherings with other Black male friends. They can be through media, such as text message threads, Instagram, or GroupMe conversations. By preparing Black men with enough knowledge about issues that affect Black women, that when a conversation arises, that is harmful towards Black women and girls, he can defend her even when she is not physically present in that space.

Lastly, the other type of protection is just being able to stand with Black women in spaces where they are speaking or telling their lived experiences. Black men can help by silencing a room of talking individuals, letting her have the space to speak in intense group conversations, not speaking over her, or calling her aggressive.

Protection should be a holistic assessment. It should not just be physical but also mental as well as emotional. Protection should be present in spaces where Black women are not. For the Black man, this can be daunting; however, these steps in protection can prevent SV/SA from occurring in the Black community.

Ownership of the Black Woman

When it came to protection Ben brought to the forefront a very interesting point, that race matters. He discusses how the white men are more willing to step down to when a Black man asks him to step away from a Black woman while when it comes stepping up to a Black man against Black man it was harder. He specifically describes it as, "I feel like they have more of a right to do what they're doing, whether it's right or not." (Personal Communication, September 2019) This sense of ownership is evident throughout history. Someone has always owned the Black woman and her body, from slavery to rape laws there has never been a time where she has owned her body and self. It is hard to find protection from even a Black men when they also feel that they own her. R. Kelly took advantage of this perspective and it played into how he managed to treat the young girls and how the men around him fed his habit.

Strengths

This study has several strengths that lead to precious data. The first is that this research is unexplored and relevant. When reviewing the literature, few studies took the time to look at sexual violence and assault through the eyes of the Black man. In this current era of movements that are focused on bringing an end to violence against women, Black men are left behind and, at times, thought to be the enemy of progress. However, this study sheds light that Black men are willing and open to having the conversation, and it was made easy by using R. Kelly as a gateway to have that conversation.

During the past ten years, there have been multiple celebrities that have been found or admitted to sexual violence against women; there is Harvey Weinstein or Bill Cosby, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden. All of these celebrities and their stories could have been used as examples

for this study. However, R. Kelly brings the story close to home for many Black men. His music was in churches, and young children's school plays or performances, he was heard in households and family reunions. To hear about his misconduct and the way that it affected Black women around them, brought the story from something lofty to right next to them.

Another strength is that this was a low stakes conversation about sexual violence and sexual assault. There was no one around to tell them that they were right or wrong. They could just talk about what they experienced. It was surprising that many of the men would sit a few minutes afterward to talk after the interviews.

Limitations

This research was not without its limitations. The first limitation was that of the researcher. As a black woman in her mid-twenties, this may/can persuade the black men to report answers that they may find socially desirable. The researcher also had their own biases that although one can try to control for it is impossible to disregard. This bias from the researcher allowed her to make assumptions into what the men were saying. In order to prevent these researcher biases and social desirability, a researcher should take a more reflexive approach to the study. For example, the researcher should take the time to transcribe the first couple of interviews and think through other questions that are excluded in the interview guide. They should take the time to be reflexive in their analysis and regularly discuss with others what they are thinking and feeling. The researcher should also take their time when interviewing and be sure to focus on what is essential but also remain open to what may come from the interviews.

When it came to the sample, there were also some limitations. The first limitation included a small sample size (n=12). A small sample size prevents generalizability for the data

that was collected. Next was how the researcher recruited participants for the study. The researcher used social networks such as co-workers, classmates, and peers as well as other social media platforms like Instagram, or GroupMe. These methods can lead to one type of participant rather than a variety. Also, in a rush to ensure that there would be data to analyze the researcher collected interviews in a short but quick period, this prevented the researcher from using a more iterative process for the interview guide. Combatting this limitation can be by allowing more time to recruit participants for the study. Furthermore, it means going to places where black men congregate or even taking the time to do a focus group with black men of different ages together.

In the analysis of the data, a limitation was the lack of multiple coders and transcribers for this study. By having a single coder, it can, at times, diminish some of the credibility of this study. By having a second coder, the researcher would discuss the findings and send the codes so that they apply to the research.

Recommendations/Implications

Although this study was preliminary, some various recommendations and implications can be used to inform further research and programming. There needs to be an increase in data collected on the number of Black women in America that are experiencing or have experienced some form of SV/SA. The data is astounding as a majority of women have experienced some form before the age of 18. However, for this study, it was difficult to find numbers specifically on Black women. By leaving this crucial data, there is the exclusion of Black voices from the narrative of SV/SA in America. As more statistics on SV/SA in Black women are collected, more qualitative data should be collected on how to bring Black men into prevention tactics. From the results in this study, it is plain to see that Black men are more than willing to sit down

and discuss this sensitive topic. By including a focus group or two, which will bring more meaning to the social, cultural nuances in Black communities around SV/SA.

Another recommendation would be to find ways to create programming or intervention methods for Black men to normalize the conversation of SV/SA or violence against women between one another. SV/SA can often feel like a woman's only flight. From #MeToo and other public movements, this can leave men feeling like they do not have to worry about this issue. This study demonstrates that men, between the ages of 23-39, are willing to have a conversation with one another. Programming should take the time to develop skits, scenarios, and other tools to provide Black men with the resources needed to arm themselves with viable information. Though these resources, then prevention can happen on the front lines.

Conclusion

For years Black women have experienced various forms of sexual violence and sexual assault. It was not until recently that Black men can and can step up into the role of protection for the Black woman. By using the R. Kelly docuseries, this study sheds light on what Black men think about SV/SA and what protection look like for the Black man in cases where they see SV/SA. These conversations are a tremendous step into ending violence against women.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

PARTICIPANT INITIALS:

DATE:

TIME:

Hello, my name is Zabi Mulwa, and I am a graduate student at Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University. I am currently completing my thesis project, where the topic is about black men's thoughts and feelings on the R. Kelly case and the sexual assault/sexual violence of black women. Are you willing to participate?

Screening: This is great; I have a couple of questions to ask you to make sure you are eligible:

1. Do you identify as a black man?
2. How old are you?
3. Have you watched the entire R. Kelly docuseries on Lifetime, Surviving R. Kelly?
 - a. If yes, thank you, you are eligible to be interviewed!

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate. The interview will take anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours depending on your responses to these questions. I ask that you answer honestly and truthfully. All of your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous, so your name and any identifying information will be re-coded. You can also choose not to answer any question that you feel is too sensitive or makes you uncomfortable. Also, because I cannot take notes fast enough, I would like to audio record our conversation, it will only be used for transcription purposes and note taking. The audio recording will be transcribed and destroyed once data analysis is completed and findings are reported. Do you have any questions or concerns?

Begin Recording:

Interview Guide:

1. After watching the docuseries, tell me what stood out to you the most?
 - i. Was there anything that surprised you? Why?
 - ii. Anything that you already knew? How did you come to know this information? Did you perceive it to be a fact or rumor?
2. Describe your feelings about the accusations against the songwriter?
 - i. What was your impression and thoughts about the stories from the women in the docuseries?
 - ii. What about the stories from the men?
 - iii. What stood out to you about his friends and family?
 - iv. What's your perception on the accountability of his friends or other adults with knowledge or evidence related to the accusations, particularly, for the underage girls?
3. Describe the discussions you've had with your friends, family, or other circles related to the docuseries or R. Kelly?
 - i. Specifically, what discussions have you had with your male friends?
 - ii. How about your family?

- iii. Have the discussions with males related to the docuseries or R. Kelly been different from discussions with females?
4. In your conversations with black women, can you describe the overall feeling that they had from the docuseries?
 - i. How would you describe their overall concerns about black men today?
 - ii. Have the conversations you've had with them influenced your perspectives on the black woman?
 - iii. Have any of these women expressed concerns for their safety? Were there concerns expressed about whether they felt they would be believed if they were in the situations described in the docuseries?
 5. Concerning black women, has there been a shift in your interactions with black women since the docuseries?
 - i. How about your relationships with black women in your life?
 - ii. Have you changed your approach to interacting with black women?
 6. Growing up, what you were told about what it means to be a black man?
 - i. Were your greatest influences and knowledge of what it means to be a black man from a woman or man? What race/ethnicity?
 - ii. Did you have a female influence growing up? If so, who was she? What race is/was she?
 - iii. How about your thoughts on how you were raised to treat black women?
 - i. Did your female influence your thoughts about how to treat women?
 7. In the docuseries someone made this statement, "No one cared because it was happening to black women," what thoughts come to mind about that quote?
 - i. If you were in any of the situations that were described by the women in the docuseries, do you think that you would have intervened?
 - ii. Do you feel that this statement holds true in today's climate? How?
 - iii. Is it hard as a black man to protect black women from such situations?
 8. Do you feel there needs to be more information, resources, and/or interventions for men to provide them with skills, knowledge, and communication skills for intervening in uncomfortable situations, particularly with male friends and family?
 - i. Do you feel these opportunities would make men more inclined to protect and step in to defend black women?

Closing

1. Is it hard to separate the man, R. Kelly, from the music? Why or why not?
2. Is there anything that you feel would add to the discussion?

Thank you so much for taking the time to discuss this topic with me. I know that it can be hard, but I appreciate your story, thoughts, and feelings.

Reflexive Note:

Appendix B: Codebook

CODE SYSTEM		DEFINITION/CRITERIA
1	Moral compass	This speaks upon the participants moral compass to these situations
2	Perception of the docuseries	This code speaks about what the participants perceive about the docuseries
	Accountability	
	Thoughts/feelings	This code captures a participant's personal reaction to the docuseries
	Time	This code captures when the men mention how long it took for the stories to appear
	Blame	Speaks upon when the participant talks about blame
	Production	When the participant speaks about the way in which the docuseries is produced
	Repetition	
	Awareness	This pertains to the knowledge or perception of a situation or fact.
3	Knowledge	Speaks upon what the participant learned/knew before and after the docuseries
4	Perception	The ability to see hear or become aware of through the senses
	Women	Captures the participants thoughts about the women in the docuseries.
	Positive	This captures the positive perceptions of r. Kelly
	Negative	This captures the negative perceptions of r. Kelly
	Socially	This captures the social perceptions of r. Kelly
5	Discussions from others	Captures what the participant has heard from others about r. Kelly
	Family	
	Women	This code captures the conversations that he has had with his friends who are women
	Men	This code is to capture what conversations have been with male friends
	Others	
6	Celebrities	This code will be specifically to quantify any time the interviewer used a celebrity name/ song by r. Kelly criteria: this will not include anytime the interviewer mentions a celebrity name.
	Song title	Capturing what music titles are mention that are by r. Kelly
	R. Kelly	This will be specifically when a participant mentions "r. Kelly" by name
	Other	This will be specifically when a participant mentions a celebrity that is not "r. Kelly" by name

7	Discussions with black women	This code is meant to capture the discussions that female women have had with people around r. Kelly.
	Concerns	
	Blame	This code captures who black women put the majority of the blame on for the r. Kelly case
	Positive	Positive outcomes from talking with black women
	Negative	Negative outcomes from the talking with black women
	Thoughts	
	Feelings	What emotional responses have women had
8	Interactions with black women	This captures the interactions between black men and women.
	Neutral	Neither positive or negative, change or no change
	Positive	Positive interactions
	Negative	Negative interactions
	Change	A change in physical or emotional connection
	No change	A no-change in physical or emotional connection
9	Masculinity /manhood	A set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with boys and men.
	Personal history	This code is used to capture the variety of how the participants grew up.
	Learned	Includes what men learned about masculinity
	Experienced	Includes experienced masculinity
	Taught	Captures who taught them what it means to be a man and what they were taught criteria: parent/extended family/friends/streets
	Male	Masculinity/manhood taught by men
	Female	Masculinity/manhood taught by a female
	Race/ethnicity	This captures the race/ethnicity for whom masculinity was taught. Criteria: black/white/African/Jamaican etc.
10	Treatment of black women	This is to capture what black men were taught about how to treat black women.
11	Quote	The thought behind this code is the responses that I received from asking them if this quote held true. Is there another way that I can think through this?
	Black community	Impact to the black community
	Racism	How the quote revolves around race
	Perceptions	This code captures the participant's reactions to the quote. Criteria: the subject uses the term "I"

		Society	<p>Captures how the participant relates the quote to what society as a whole think and believes.</p> <p>Criteria: anytime the subject speaks about any experience that is not their own</p>
12	Protection		This code captures the act of protecting women from SV/SA
		Difficult	This quote is to capture when protection is difficult
		Easy	This quote is to capture when protection is easy
		Influence	<p>When there is alcohol or other substances are involved in the situation.</p> <p>Criteria: the substance must be brought up by the participant.</p>
		Personal protection	This code is to capture the way in which men protect themselves in social situations
		Observe	Captures how men assess situations before jumping in to help a woman in trouble.
		Social	Captures society and the way that protection against SV/SA looks like.
		Barriers	This code speaks upon what prevents black men from protecting black men.
		Personal	This code captures the personal ability to protect a black women
13	Personal experiences with SV/SA		<p>Captures what SV/SA the participant has encountered in their life.</p> <p>Criteria: personal/someone they know/family/friends</p>
		Personally	Captures personal experiences with SV/SA
		Within friendship	<p>Captures how the participants would have/has intervened in SV/SA within their friendships</p> <p>criteria: hypothetical situation</p>
		Outside of friendship	<p>Captures how the participants would have/has experienced SV/SA outside of their friendships, social experiences with SV/SA</p> <p>criteria: hypothetical situation</p>
14	Recommendations		<p>Captures what the men think they need to "protect" black women.</p> <p>Criteria: knowledge/breaking stereotypes</p>
15	Music		Captures the participants thoughts about muting r. Kelly.