

WHEN SEXUAL ASSAULT IS POLITICAL: VARIATIONS IN REACTIONS AND POLITICAL
BEHAVIOR AMONG WOMEN SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

By

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Dedicated to my family, friends, and all the women who have inspired and participated in this project.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
1 Taylor Swift, Aly Raisman and Your Friends: The Puzzle of Sexual Assault and Political Behavior	1
1.1 The Puzzle: Different Outcomes after Sexual Assault	3
1.2 Introducing Personal Narratives	4
1.3 Differences Between Respondents	9
1.4 When Does Sexual Assault Affect Political Behavior?	11
2 Listening to and Learning From Survivors: Using Semi-Structured Interviews to Examine How Sexual Assault and Politics are Connected	13
2.1 The Effects of Sexual Assault	13
2.2 Grounded Theory	17
2.3 Method: Semi-structured interviews	18
2.4 Data Analysis: The Process of Grounded Theory	23
2.5 Main Theories	26
2.5.1 Theory 1: Political System Attribution	26
2.5.2 Theory 2: Attending Therapy	30
2.5.3 Theory 3: Survivor/Victim Identity	32
2.6 Outcomes	34
2.6.1 Political Attitudes	34
2.6.2 Support for Oppressed Groups	35
2.6.3 Political Participation	37
2.7 Chapter Conclusion	40
3 Survey Measurement and Implementation	41
3.1 Survey Instrument	42
3.2 Survey Implementation	45
3.3 Sample Characteristics	46
3.4 Chapter Conclusion	49
4 Who's To Blame? Quantitative Analysis of Political System Attribution	50
4.1 Political System Attribution Distribution	50
4.2 Demographics of Political System Attribution	51
4.3 Analysis of the Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes	52
4.4 Analysis of the Effect of Political System Attribution on Women's Rights Political Participation	61
4.5 Qualitative Evidence	65
4.6 Chapter Conclusion	66
5 Processing the Assault: Quantitative Analysis of Attending Therapy	68
5.1 Demographics of Attending Therapy	68

5.2	Effect of Attending Therapy on Political System Attribution	70
5.3	Effect of Attending Therapy of Policy Attitudes	71
5.4	Effect of Attending Therapy on Views Towards Oppressed Groups	73
5.5	Chapter Conclusion	75
6	One of Many: Quantitative Analysis of Self-Labeling as a Survivor/Victim	77
6.1	Demographics of a Survivor/Victim Identity	77
6.2	Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Policy Attitudes	79
6.3	Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Views Towards Oppressed Groups	81
6.4	Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Political Participation	84
6.5	Chapter Conclusion	87
7	Beyond the Survivor Sample: Examining Those Who Have Personally Experienced Sexual Assault in Comparison to Those With Proximate Contact and No Contact	88
7.1	Demographics of Personal Experience, Proximate Contact and No Contact	90
7.2	Effects of Political System Attribution Among the Groups	92
7.2.1	Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes for Personal, Proximate and No Contact	94
7.2.2	Effect of Political System Attribution on Women’s Rights Political Participation by Personal, Proximate, and No Contact	97
7.3	Effect of Attending Therapy by Personal, Proximate and No Contact	100
7.3.1	Effect of Attending Therapy on Political Attitudes for Personal, Proximate and No Contact	101
7.3.2	Effect of Attending Therapy on Views Towards Oppressed Groups by Personal, Proximate and No Contact	104
7.4	Chapter Conclusion	105
8	Conclusion	107
8.1	Discussion of Main Objective	107
8.2	What does this dissertation mean for the study of politics in America?	111
8.3	Conclusion	113
A	Chapter 2 Appendix	114
B	Chapter 3 Appendix	118
C	Chapter 4 Appendix	130
D	Chapter 6 Appendix	134
E	Chapter 7 Appendix	137
	References	143

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
3.1 Sample Characteristics: Race Distribution	47
3.2 Sample Characteristics: Income Distribution	48
3.3 Sample Characteristics: Education Distribution	48
3.4 Sample Characteristics: Partisan Distribution	49
4.1 Distribution of Political System Attribution	50
4.2 Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes	54
4.3 Mean Women’s Rights Participation Scale	62
4.4 Effect of Political System Attribution on Women’s Rights Political Participation	64
5.1 Demographics of Attending Therapy	70
5.2 Effect of Therapy on Political System Attribution	71
5.3 Effect of Therapy on Policy Attitudes	72
5.4 Distribution of Views Towards Oppressed Groups for Survey Respondents	74
5.5 Effect of Therapy on View Towards Oppressed Groups	75
6.1 Demographics of a Survivor/Victim Identity	78
6.2 Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Policy Attitudes	80
6.3 Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Views Towards Oppressed Groups	82
6.4 Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Women’s Rights Political Participation	85
7.1 Distribution of Personal Experience, Proximate Experience and No Contact Among the Full Sample	89
7.2 Demographics of Personal Experience, Proximate Experience and No Contact Among the Full Sample	91
7.3 Political System Attribution Scale by Personal, Proximate and No Contact	93
7.4 Effect of Proximate and No Contact Categories on Political System Attribution	94
7.5 Mean of Policy Attitudes for Personal, Proximate and No Contact	95
7.6 Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes With Group Indicators	96
7.7 Mean of Women’s Rights Political Participation Items and Scale by Personal, Proximate and No Contact	99
7.8 Mean of Attending Therapy by Personal, Proximate and No Contact	100
7.9 Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Attending Therapy	101
7.10 Effect of Attending Therapy on Political Attitudes with Group Indicators	102
7.11 Mean of Views Towards Oppressed Groups by Personal, Proximate and No Contact	104
7.12 Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Views Towards Oppressed Groups	105
C.1 Distribution of Abortion Opinions	130
C.2 Distribution of Accused Politician Opinions	130
C.3 Distribution of Rape Sentence Opinions	130
C.4 Effect of Political System Attribution on All Crime Outcomes	131
C.5 ANES Sample Comparison for Political Participation	133
D.1 Binary Indicators for Survivor/Victim/Both Identities and Policy Attitudes	134
D.2 Effect of Binary Indicators for Survivor/Victim/Both Identities on Views Towards Oppressed Groups	135
D.3 Effect of Binary Indicators for Survivor/Victim/Both Identities on Women’s Rights Participation	136
E.1 Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Political Attitudes	137

E.2	Moderation Analysis Examining if The Effect of Political System Attribution on Political Attitudes is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault	138
E.3	Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Women’s Rights Political Participation	139
E.4	Moderation Analysis Examining if the Effect of Political System Attribution on Political Participation is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault	140
E.5	Moderation Analysis Examining if The Effect of Attending Therapy on Political Attitudes is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault	141
E.6	Moderation Analysis Examining if The Effect of Attending Therapy on Views Towards Oppressed Groups is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault	142

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
4.1 Political System Attribution by Political Party	52
4.2 Predicted Probabilities of Accused Politician Category by Political System Attribution . . .	56
4.3 Predicted Probabilities of Preferred Rape Sentences by Political System Attribution	58
4.4 Predicted Probabilities of Preferred Drug Possession and Murder Sentences by Political System Attribution	60
4.5 Percentage of Women Who Participate in Each Item on the Women’s Rights Participation Scale	62
4.6 Predicted Probability of Women’s Rights Acts by Political System Attribution Category .	65
6.1 Predicted Probability of Being ‘Very Concerned’ for Groups Based on Survivor/Victim Identity	83
6.2 Predicted Probability of Participating in Women’s Rights Acts by Survivor/Victim Identity	86
7.1 Comparison of the Predicted Probability of Supporting the Death Sentence by Political System Attribution for No Contact and Personal Experience	97
7.2 Predicted Probabilities of Abortion Views and Rape Sentence by Attending Therapy for Personal and No Contact	103
A.1 Interview Guide	115
A.2 Participation Flyer	117
B.1 Survey Instrument	119
C.1 Predicted Probabilities of Abortion Views by Political System Attribution Category	132

CHAPTER 1

Taylor Swift, Aly Raisman and Your Friends: The Puzzle of Sexual Assault and Political Behavior

Taylor Swift first became famous in 2006 for her country music about pickup trucks, kissing in the rain and high school football games. She was blonde, white, and sweet – the All-American girl who was ready to appeal to conservative middle America. Reflecting on her earlier career in her 2019 Netflix documentary, *Miss Americana*, Swift explains that throughout her early career she was encouraged to not get political by her management to maintain this profitable image. Any time Swift would get close to speaking about politics, she was warned that her fate could follow that of The Chicks (formally known as The Dixie Chicks), the all-girl country-pop group who were disowned by country music after criticizing Republican President George W. Bush (Wilson, 2020). Heeding these warnings, Swift listened to her management and continued to maintain a ‘good girl’ image to keep the peace and not alienate any listeners.

This all changed in 2017. When Swift was still firmly non-political in 2013, a radio DJ stuck his hand up the back of Swift’s dress at a meet and greet. Swift did not publicly acknowledge the incident at the time and instead privately told her security and the radio station, who fired the DJ. In 2015, the DJ chose to make the incident public and sued Swift for defamation and wage loss. Instead of quietly settling like the DJ wanted, Swift decided to counter-sue the DJ for a symbolic one dollar, meant to represent all the women who have been through similar scenarios but did not have the voice or status that she did. In court, Swift delivered a powerful testimony, claiming, “He grabbed my bare a**” (Ryzik, 2017) when asked to describe what happened. The case against Swift was dismissed and she won her symbolic one dollar.

After the trial, Swift continued to talk about the case rather than move on from it. In 2017, Swift, along with other survivors of sexual assault, was on the cover of Time Magazine as one of the Silence Breakers, women who were speaking out against sexual assault and abuse after the #MeToo Movement. The symbolic dollar was prominently featured in her music video for “Look What You Made Me Do”, the lead single off her 2017 album, *reputation*, and has remained a visual for Swift ever since. Swift also chose to part ways with her management after 2017 to have more control over her own career and image.

Swift’s comfort with taking public political positions has continued to grow. In 2019 Swift released two political songs: You Need to Calm Down, a pro-LGBTQ+ song and video which included a petition for equal rights at the end, and Only the Young – a song about her reaction to Hillary Clinton’s Presidential race loss and the hope that young people bring to politics. Swift also made her first political endorsement – endorsing Tennessee Senate Democratic candidate Phil Bredesen over Republican Marsha Blackburn. In the Netflix documentary, Swift breaks down her decision to make the endorsement after processing everything

that occurred in her trial.

“I just thought to myself [after the sexual assault trial], ‘Next time there is any opportunity to change anything, you better know what you stand for and what you want to say. . . . She (Blackburn) votes against the re-authorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which is just basically protecting us from domestic abuse and stalking. Stalking. She thinks that if you’re a gay couple, or even if you look like a gay couple, you should be allowed to be kicked out of a restaurant. It’s really basic human rights, and it’s right and wrong at this point..”

– Taylor Swift in *Miss Americana*

Swift has continued to involve herself in politics since 2019. In 2020, Swift made a public endorsement of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris for the 2020 Presidential race. She has stated her pro-choice views in interviews, has tweeted against white supremacy and she has called on various members of Congress at awards acceptance shows for various causes. While some may argue that was late to the political show, there is no doubt that Swift is now willing to insert herself into political conversations and is no longer afraid of the career consequences of doing so.

Swift’s journey to becoming a political figure is like that of another famous woman – Aly Raisman. In 2016, Aly Raisman became the third most decorated Olympic gymnast in United States history. Raisman had been working her whole life to become an elite gymnast, and like most women aiming to become Olympians, she was willing to do whatever it took to get there. The culture of gymnastics tends to instill an authoritarian type of coaching on the girls, where the views of the coach are taken as the final word. Raisman claims that this culture in gymnastics normalized abuse of all kinds- physical, mental, and emotional. It was not until after Raisman left gymnastics that she truly realized how bad it was (Orbey, 2021). Like Swift, Raisman states in an interview that she was encouraged to keep her mouth shut, listen to the authority figures and generally be an agreeable and pliable person to reach her goals (Orbey, 2021).

This culture created a situation where Raisman was unable to recognize her own abuse. When Raisman got injured and was referred to the ‘best’ doctor for gymnasts, serial rapist Larry Nassar, she had no hesitations about going. Many investigations show that even at this point in time, women had reported him for sexual abuse. However, nothing had ever come of those accusations and USA Gymnastics had swept the allegations under the rug and allowed Nassar to keep working. Raisman, who was only 15 years old, had no idea that the ‘procedures’ Nassar was forcing upon her were sexual assault. She believed that those in positions of authority, including Nassar, only wanted the best for her. She later revealed that this abuse was still occurring while she was competing at the 2016 Olympics in Rio.

When Larry Nassar’s abuse was first made public in the *Indy Star*, brought forward by former gymnast

Rachel Denhollander, Aly Raisman came forward as one of the many women who was abused by Nassar. At the time, Raisman was the highest profile person to come out against Nassar, though recently Simone Biles (the most decorated gymnast in United States history) has also come forward after her own mental struggles at the 2020 Olympics.

Since coming forward, Raisman has shed the submissive persona gymnastics had instilled in her and has instead used her own abuse as a call to action to prevent abuse in other young women (Abad-Santos, 2017). In 2017, in the interview with *60 Minutes* where she revealed what happened to her, Raisman stated:

“I care a lot you know, when I see these young girls that come up to me, and they ask for pictures or autographs, whatever it is, every time I look at them, every time I see them smiling, I just think– I just want to create change so that they never, ever have to go through this.”

- Aly Raisman

Raisman has stayed true to her word to create change. Today, she is a prominent activist for sexual assault survivors. Raisman is a spokesperson for Darkness to Light – an organization dedicated to prevention of child sexual abuse. She has also testified in court cases against Nassar and the organization USA Gymnastics to create safer environments for athletes. Raisman has also lobbied Congress, along with other prominent gymnasts such as Biles, to make sexual abuse cases more seriously. Additionally, she has discussed the assaults and the aftermath in her book *Fierce* and speaks around the country against sexual assault.

There is no doubt now that Aly Raisman is outspoken. Rather than being timid and willing to do whatever it takes to be a gymnast, Raisman is now re-writing the rules for what a successful gymnast and giving young girls the role-model she never had. Rather than stay silent, she is fighting back against an entrenched and powerful organization to make sure that other women never have to deal with the same abuse.

1.1 The Puzzle: Different Outcomes after Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is defined by RAINN, the nation’s largest anti-sexual violence organization, as any form of ‘sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim.’ Rape is defined as ‘penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with anybody part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim’ *RAINN - Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network* (2021). This dissertation will focus on rape but will use the terms rape and sexual assault interchangeably - as rape is a form of sexual assault.

Sexual assault is a traumatic experience that can lead to symptoms such as depression, PTSD, and can cause an individual to withdraw from daily life (Mason and Lodrick, 2013). Typically, mental health is-

sues like depression can also cause someone to withdraw from politics (Ojeda, 2015; Hobbs, Christakis and Fowler, 2014). Yet, for both Swift and Raisman, there was an opposite effect. Coming to terms with their sexual assaults emboldened them to become more outspoken and involved in politics, not less. Swift developed a more liberal, feminist persona and Raisman became an outspoken activist. It would have been easier for both women to privately settle their cases or to not come forward at all, yet they both came forward in very public ways and drew attention to the issue by participating more in politics, not less.

The idea that women may be spurred to change their political behavior based on their sexual assault is consistent with lines of political science literature that show that experiencing a victimizing event can affect political participation (Blattman, 2009; Bateson, 2012; Marsh, 2022; Hartman and Morse, 2020) and that life changing events have concrete effects on a wide variety of attitudes and behaviors (Stoker and Jennings, 1995; Hobbs, Christakis and Fowler, 2014; Kam, Kirshbaum and Chojnacki, 2022). However, we should not expect there to be a universal effect of sexual assault on women, as there are reasons to believe that there is meaningful variation among the group. Sexual assault is not a cut and dry crime like petty theft (Bateson, 2012) and requires internal negotiation and acceptance that can vary widely among survivors (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018). The variation in interpretations and understandings of sexual assault could subsequently affect if and how someone chooses to engage in politics after an assault, meaning that these different interpretations that emerge from sexual assault would create the change, not simply the assault itself. This project aims to uncover what some of these varying circumstances and reactions are that can lead to change in political attitudes and participation among some sexual assault survivors, but not others and leads to the main research question of the project: **When will sexual assault affect the political behavior of women survivors?**

1.2 Introducing Personal Narratives

To begin exploring how different reactions and interpretations of sexual assault may lead to different political outcomes, this section introduces narratives from five different women who are sexual assault survivors that provide some initial insights into how sexual assault affects political behavior. The narratives are from five women- Kaitlyn, Courtney, Rebecca, Michelle, and Sienna who participated in semi-structured interviews for this dissertation ¹. These respondents were chosen to highlight for two reasons 1) they have illustrative stories and quotes and 2) they are all demographically similar. By examining women who are similar in demographics, but have different reactions, ideas can start to form of what specific circumstances create political change rather than just attributing the change to the demographics, which may be the instinct if the narratives presented were from women of widely varying race, class, and ethnicity statuses.

¹All names and potentially identifying details have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the respondents.

All five respondents are white and have college degrees. Four out of five of the respondents are in their 20's and three out of five express strong religious ideals that guide how they operate in life. They are either from the South or Midwest, ie: places that tend to have a stronger conservative ethos than the West or Northeast. Despite these similarities in life, these women all had slightly different reactions to their assaults. While some of these women here follow the narrative laid out by Taylor Swift and Aly Raisman and change their political beliefs and participation, others do not experience any changes to their political behavior. The subsequent chapter (Chapter 2) will delve even deeper into these differences and suggest reasons why political behavior varies after an assault.

Kaitlyn

Kaitlyn is a college-educated, white woman in her late twenties who lives in the South. Kaitlyn is a person who holds her religious faith as something that is very important to her and wants to eventually become a therapist. Currently, she works in ministry at a religious high school. Kaitlyn comes from a family with some conservatives and some liberals but considers herself to be a liberal. Kaitlyn is very passionate about social justice and is a vocal supporter of LGBTQ+ rights, despite her church's position, and makes a strong effort to make sure that everyone around her knows she is supportive of them.

Kaitlyn's assaults took place after parties when she was a sophomore in college at a faith-based university. Her perpetrators were known acquaintances. Kaitlyn reported her assaults to university authorities, where she was required to not only go through university proceedings but also religious processes the university had in place. Eventually, Kaitlyn's case became a very high-profile case in the community she lived in at the time, despite her best efforts to try and keep the case low-profile. The assault cases played a large role in her college experience and became a defining element of college, as she was embroiled in legal proceedings for all her sophomore, junior and senior years. One perpetrator did eventually receive punishment from the university, but less than she would have liked them to. After college, she left the city she was in so she could leave that experience behind her and move forward.

Over time, Kaitlyn has attended therapy and thought deeply about her assault and how it is connected to systems of oppression, something she deeply cares about, and what that means for her own life. Kaitlyn says that rape culture played a role in her assault and allows her to see how she is connected to those systems of oppression. Kaitlyn sees the assault as something that has fundamentally changed how she interacts with the outside world and as a defining moment in her own life.

Kaitlyn is very involved in politics. Her interest in politics followed her assaults. After her assault, Kaitlyn wanted to learn more about oppression and chose to major in African American studies along with her Theology major. Before her job in ministry, Kaitlyn worked in racial justice and advocacy and Diversity,

Equity, and Inclusion. Currently, Kaitlin uses this lens to inform how she teaches concepts related to diversity, sexual health, and LGBTQ+ rights to her high school students.

Courtney

Courtney is a white college senior in her early twenties from the Midwest. She is a talented artist who hopes to one day start a business where she can utilize her artistic abilities. She also loves yoga, skiing and traveling. Courtney comes from a conservative family and considers herself to be conservative.

Courtney's assault took place at a college party by an acquaintance with whom she felt comfortable. At the time of the interview, Courtney's assault was recent. Courtney did not report her assault to the police because she did not want the assault to be permanently attached to her on a public record, but she had no hesitation in labeling what happened to her as assault and cutting off contact with her perpetrator immediately. She did not tell many people what happened, but those that she did tell believed her and supported her. She is very forward about her experience and does not feel like she should sugar coat it for anyone.

After her assault, Courtney went to a local rape crisis center, but at the time of the interview did not want to continue with any type of therapy. Even though Courtney recognizes what happened to her as assault and is not happy with it, she does not want the assault to become something that is a defining moment for her. She does not blame herself whatsoever but thinks that the situation probably looks less black and white from the outside since she and the perpetrator had both been drinking alcohol. She does not think he would have attacked her had he not been drinking.

Courtney is moderately involved in politics. While she does not think that being a conservative is the defining factor of her identity (she identifies as conservative, but not necessarily a Republican), she continues to be active in a local conservative organization that she was involved in before her assault. Those from the conservative organization who know what happened are supportive and believe her. While she is conservative, she does her best to be able to talk and communicate with liberals because she typically works around liberal people.

Rebecca

Rebecca is a college-educated (undergraduate and Masters), white woman in her forties from the Midwest. Rebecca works as an engineer and is an extremely devoted mother and wife. She loves to travel and is very dedicated to her religious beliefs. Rebecca is very community oriented; she is involved in her local PTA and church and tries to provide a safe space for both her children and other children in the community who need it.

Rebecca's dedication to children comes from her own experiences. Rebecca's violent assault took place

when she was a young teenager by a known and trusted person who she had worked for consistently as a babysitter. She reported her assault to the police immediately, and her rapist was eventually convicted. This was an extremely difficult experience for her because her rapist was a close family friend, and she was blamed for “ruining his life” and called sexually promiscuous, which was psychologically damaging for her as she had intended to abstain from sex until marriage because of her religious beliefs.

Very few people outside of Rebecca’s most inner circle know about her assault. She told her immediate family afterwards and they were extremely supportive and helped her through the medical and legal process. Rebecca’s assault affected how she dated for many years. She never felt comfortable being alone with a man and always went on dates with friends. When she eventually told her current husband about her assault, he was extremely supportive of her, which made Rebecca feel comfortable committing to a relationship with him. Rebecca recently told her oldest son, who is in high school, about her assault because he is entering the age where he may be considering sexual relationships. This was a very difficult moment for her, but she felt it was necessary to give him context to how she thinks and advises his decisions towards relationships. Outside of her family, Rebecca has one close friend with a similar experience who she has discussed her assault with. Rebecca sees assault as an issue that is rooted in the family and connects it to how she raises her boys. She says multiple times in the interview that she aims to provide a safe place for children because you never know what they are going through, as most people in her life did not know what she was going through at the time.

Rebecca is neutral towards politics. She has not voted in the last few national elections; however, she thinks that any politician accused of sexual assault is automatically less trustworthy. While she tends to stay neutral in politics, she does think that kindness needs to be regarded with greater importance. During the 2016 election, she was the only person on her street to not have a Trump sign and she expresses that she wishes Hillary Clinton would have won. Rebecca does care very much about how local schools are operated – her discussion with her son about her own assault took place when he was going through sex education classes so that he would have the full picture of what consent and sexual relationships look like.

Michelle

Michelle is a college-educated woman from the Midwest in her early-twenties who is currently in graduate school. She is extremely ambitious (something she struggled with admitting in the past but is very proud of now) and is an avid animal lover with an exceptional soft spot for cows. Michelle is from a conservative family and grew up conservative, though she considers herself to be an independent now and has voted for both political parties in her life.

Michelle’s religious faith is very important to her, and she always wanted to take it slow when it came to sexual relationships. Originally from a small, rural, farming town, Michelle thought she was going to marry

her high school boyfriend. However, once she moved away and went to college, Michelle realized she wanted freedom and broke off the relationship. Over time, Michelle came to realize that the entire relationship had been coercive in terms of sex, and that she had never truly consented to what took place. She has gone to therapy for her assaults, which has helped her talk through what happened in a way that she would not be able to with her family.

Michelle has only discussed her experiences in full detail with a therapist. Michelle has discussed her past relationship with her friends to an extent but has not told them everything. She says her friends have some context to the controlling nature of the relationship because they had spoken to her about it, but did not know the full extent and that she did not want to be sexually active. Her hesitation to fully disclose to her friends comes from her worry that people will not understand why she is uncomfortable with what happened, as most of her friends do not come from the same religious background as she does and may have more liberal views on sex. Michelle has never reported her assault to the police and does not know if it qualifies as something worth reporting to the police. Michelle sees her assault as connected to the way that women are largely treated in society. While she does not explicitly blame rape culture like Kaitlin, she expresses that over time she has come to appreciate women becoming free and not having to ask permission to do things.

Michelle is moderately involved in politics. She considers herself to be neutral towards the national level but does vote in every election and is relatively well-versed in what is happening. Even though Michelle considers herself to be neutral, she is quite active at her local level. Michelle is the president of her graduate student association and ran on a platform that emphasized mental health, something she realized was important specifically after her abusive relationship and is also a prominent issue in her chosen field of study.

Sienna

Sienna is a white, college-educated woman in her mid-twenties from the Midwest. She is currently in graduate school and is extremely passionate about issues of inequality. Sienna is someone who has given quite a bit of thought to how sexual assault has affected her life and sees it as an important and influential event. Sienna considers herself to be liberal.

Sienna's assault was perpetrated by her boyfriend at the time. Sienna did not initially label her experience as assault and tried to pass it off as a regrettable sexual experience. However, she started to display symptoms of PTSD (though she did not identify it as such at the time). These symptoms were very distressing for her, so she sought out help and eventually began intense trauma therapy. Through this trauma therapy, Sienna realized what happened to her and came to terms with the unhealthy nature of her past relationship. Like many survivors, Sienna initially held some self-blame for the attack, however, over time she began to accept and understand that the assault was not her fault. After going through trauma therapy, Sienna started to slowly

tell those in her life about her assault and has been able to establish a strong support network. Sienna has a strong sense of kinship with other survivors and sees herself as connected to other survivors.

Sienna is extremely involved in politics. Sienna has always been interested in politics, even before her assault. Now, Sienna has become a loud advocate for sexual assault despite the mental effect it takes on her. On her college campus, Sienna helped found an anti-sexual assault group that provided her a space to both address the issue and allowed her to form a strong network of survivors to help her heal. Her efforts were especially prominent because her college campus was at the center of a large sexual assault scandal at the time, which led to her group gaining some national attention. She has also worked on a political campaign in the past and intends to work in politics after she finishes her graduate degree in a field that is related to politics.

1.3 Differences Between Respondents

Through examining the narrative of these women, three circumstances emerge that could suggest eventual differences in political behavior among sexual assault survivors. First, is who/what a person holds responsible for the attack. Second is the effect of attending therapy and deeply processing the event. Last is how connected the respondent feels to other survivors who have experienced the same thing.

Responsibility Attribution – Kaitlyn and Michelle v Rebecca and Courtney

The first major difference to be explored is responsibility attribution. Both Kaitlyn and Michelle express on some level that they see the way society treats women as a reason that the assault took place. While both attribute responsibility to the perpetrator, they also see themselves caught in a system that systematically enforces power differences between men and women and express a desire to break this system. The fact that Kaitlyn and Michelle see themselves as part of a larger system suggests they both understand the deeply political concept of rape culture, even if they do not mention rape culture specifically, and see it is an underlying reason for why rape occurs in society.

On the other hand, Rebecca and Courtney do not discuss societal level factors that suggest that they blame rape culture for their assaults. When discussing causes for their assaults, Rebecca, and Courtney focus on more individual level factors such as the morals of the perpetrator themselves and the way that families choose to raise their boys as the reasons why rape continues to persist. While neither respondent blames themselves or sees the act as defensible, their blame lies more in individual level factors that suggest if the perpetrator or family was different, then maybe the assault would not have occurred.

The difference between attributing sexual assault to societal and political forces as compared to individual level factors may be creating difference in the political actions of the individuals. Kaitlyn and Michelle tend

to participate in politics more than Rebecca and Courtney and express more specific and targeted opinions towards women's rights. This suggests that women who see the political system as responsible in some way for their assault may be more likely to interact with politics concerning women's rights in comparison to women who do not see politics as appropriate place to deal with their assault. It is important to note here, that the women who do not blame politics (Rebecca and Courtney) do not excuse the assault or blame themselves, they just see the causes and solutions to sexual assault as more appropriate for other areas of life that are not related to politics.

Attending Therapy – Sienna and Michelle v Courtney

Another major difference that emerges is attending therapy in the wake of an assault. Sienna underwent intense therapy after her own assault. Courtney, at least at the time, had not undergone the same type of therapy. While Sienna and Courtney had differing predispositions before their assaults, Sienna's liberal positions only strengthened whereas Courtney's opinions remained relatively the same. Michelle also offers an interesting case here. Michelle speaks with very few people about her assault besides her former therapist, yet her views towards issues like women's rights have moved to the left after processing her relationship. This may show that even if someone does not have a strong support system around, having the opportunity to process the event through therapy could be enough to create at least a subtle change in political behavior.

Connection to other Survivors (Survivor/Victim Identity) – Sienna and Kaitlyn v Rebecca and Courtney

The last potential variation that will be explored in this dissertation is if the respondent identifies as a Survivor/Victim of assault. Over the course of their interviews, Kaitlin and Sienna repeatedly indicated that they felt a connection to other survivors of sexual assault, and that this feeling of care and connection led them to act in ways that helped other survivors of sexual assault and other people in similar situations.

Rebecca and Courtney did not express the same feelings of closeness to other survivors. It is clear from the interviews that for both Rebecca and Courtney, their assaults, while traumatic, did not influence how they connect with other women and how close they feel to them. The contrast between these respondents suggests that when someone sees themselves as strongly connected to other survivors of sexual assault, they are more likely to act on behalf of the group that they see themselves as part of versus when that tie is weak or does not exist.

1.4 When Does Sexual Assault Affect Political Behavior?

This dissertation provides a starting point for those interested in understanding when sexual assault will affect the political behavior of survivors. Rather than treating sexual assault as a binary variable that assumes every woman reacts to and is affected in the same way by sexual assault, this dissertation attempts to examine why survivors act differently from each other and examines what creates that variation.

Based off original semi-structured interviews with 16 survivors of sexual assault, the dissertation proposes that three variables should affect political behavior: Political System Attribution, Attending Therapy, and a Survivor/Victim Identity. Political System Attributions reflects the idea that as someone holds politics as more responsible for the causes or the solutions to sexual assault, it will affect their behavior. Attending Therapy proposes that as women reflect more about their assault, they will be more likely to change their political behavior. The last variable, a Survivor/Victim Identity proposes that women who strongly self-identify as a Survivor or Victim, indicating they consider it as something that is important to who they are as a person, they will be more likely to change their political behavior. The interviews also revealed three ways that political behavior may be affected: Attitudes towards Women's Rights, Political Participation concerning Women's Rights and Views Towards Oppressed Groups.

Ultimately, when tested using a survey, the results show that Political System Attribution and a Survivor/Victim Identity are significantly related to the political behavior of survivors, with less concrete evidence for Attending Therapy. Political System Attribution affects both Political Attitudes concerning Women's Rights and Political Participation concerning Women's Rights. As someone holds the Political System as more responsible for their assault, they will move in the liberal direction on their attitudes and increase their participation. Similarly, a Survivor/Victim Identity increases Political Participation concerning Women's Rights and also significantly affects the views someone has towards oppressed out-groups – meaning that those who specifically identify as a Survivor or Victim are more empathetic towards people who are oppressed in society than those who do not choose to identify as a Survivor or Victim.

The following chapters will work to build out the three concepts: Political System Attribution, Attending Therapy and Survivor/Victim Identity. Chapter Two will present a more thorough analysis of these concepts using data from 16 semi-structured interviews with survivors of sexual assault and will offer both concrete hypotheses. Chapter Three discusses the best way to quantitatively test the hypotheses through a survey and presents both the measurements of concepts as well as general demographics of the survey.

Chapter Four will present the Political System Attribution findings, Chapter Five the Therapy findings, and Chapter Six the Survivor/Victim Identity findings. Chapter Seven will provide a descriptive comparison between sexual assault survivors and non-survivors to give some context to how localized the main findings of

the dissertation are to survivors in comparison to women in general. Last, Chapter 8 concludes by discussing some larger implications and potential future applications of the project.

CHAPTER 2

Listening to and Learning From Survivors: Using Semi-Structured Interviews to Examine How Sexual Assault and Politics are Connected

2.1 The Effects of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault can have long term psychological effects on those who are subjected to it. Survivors of sexual assault can experience psychological symptoms such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, difficulties with social adjustment, difficulties with sexual functioning, and suicidal ideation at levels significantly above someone who has not experienced sexual assault (Mason and Lodrick, 2013; Ullman, Peter-Hagene and Relyea, 2014). Rape survivors are also more likely to engage in coping mechanisms such as heavy alcohol and drug use because of these problems (Mason and Lodrick, 2013; Miranda et al., 2002). Many survivors also do not immediately recognize their assault as the reason that these damaging effects emerge (Ullman, 1996; Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings, 2010). The unclear causes of their symptoms can create situations where the women blame themselves for both the attack and their resulting psychological problems – decreasing the amount of help that they seek for the symptoms (Ullman, 1996; Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings, 2010).

Additionally, survivors of sexual assault may face economic distress after their assault. Loya (2015) finds that after an assault, women experience a decline in long term economic well-being due to the psychological problems they develop disrupting employment by diminished job performance, inability to work, and even job loss in some circumstances. This is supported by (Peterson et al., 2017) who demonstrates that the lifetime cost of a rape is \$122,461 due to factors such as medical care, criminal justice system costs and lost work productivity. Women may also have long lasting physical effects that can continue to impact their health for the rest of their lives (Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings, 2010).

Current Understanding of Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment and Politics

Despite the wide-reaching effects of sexual assault, there has not been a comprehensive study of the effects of sexual assault in American politics. This omission seems puzzling, as American political science literature has consistently taken mental health, physical health and life changing events as serious variables that affect one's political life (Ojeda, 2015; Schur and Adya, 2013; Schur and Kruse, 2000; Hobbs, Christakis and Fowler, 2014; Highton, 2000; Stoker and Jennings, 1995). When studied in political science, sexual violence is mostly studied in the context of countries outside of the United States (Cohen, 2013; Wood, 2006; Koos, 2018) and is framed as a tool of war. Rather than use an ethical frame that tackles systematic reasons why assault may occur, Crawford (2017) proposed that the tool-of-war frame is used to get society and the

discipline of political science to take it more seriously, as the concept of rape can make certain audiences uncomfortable. The results of the study of wartime sexual violence have found important and concrete effects that demonstrate the importance of studying assault using this wartime frame. For example, Cohen (2013) finds that armed actors commit rape to create unit cohesion rather than as a sexual act, Wood (2006) documents that rape is a strategic choice during war and finds that victims of wartime sexual violence will later engage in more pro-social behavior compared to those who did not experience violence. This literature is useful in showing clear and concrete effects of rape in these wartime contexts, however, it has yet to address why levels of sexual violence continue to remain high even in times of peace or countries that are not at war – like America.

In the American context, 2017's #MeToo movement has also spurred political scientists to study concepts related to sexual assault. Jose, Fowler and Raj (2019) and Bankert (2020) find that there are differences in reports of sexual harassment and assault between liberal and conservative women. Craig and Cossette (2020) further show the effects of partisanship by demonstrating that partisanship shapes citizen's attitudes towards sexual harassment. Expanding the research on how sexual assault is related to American politics beyond partisanship, Schwarz, Baum and Cohen (2020) examine how the public views rape and makes decisions on juries about punishment, finding that people take individual characteristics of victims and perpetrators into account. Castle et al. (2020) also find that the #MeToo movement increased awareness of sexual assault, which subsequently increased political participation for highly interested, Democratic women. This small but growing line of research acknowledges that sexual harassment and violence have taken on a partisan and political meaning in American society. However, the focus tends to be on how partisans interpret the meaning of harassment, rather than understanding how the events themselves affect the subsequent political behavior of the women.

Political Effects of Crime and Life Altering Events

Literature that explores the effect of crime and life altering events also suggest possible political effects that could emerge from sexual assault. Research that has focused on other types of crime victimization have shown consistent effects on political participation. Bateson (2012) demonstrates that individuals who experience crime participate in politics more, while Blattman (2009) shows that individuals who were forced into violent experiences in their youth were more active in political life later in life due to post-traumatic growth. This work on victimization is furthered by Dorff (2017) who shows that individuals who experience violent crimes but have strong support networks are more politically active in Mexico and Lupu and Peisakhin (2017) who demonstrate that experiencing political violence leaves a long-lasting effect on the political participation on not just the victims, but also their descendants.

Political Science literature has also demonstrated that major life events not related to crime can change the political behavior of individuals. Stoker and Jennings 1995 show that marriage affects political participation as partners adjust to the participation level of their partner. Political participation is also affected by moving residences (Highton, 2000), becoming a widow (Hobbs, Christakis and Fowler, 2014) and depression (Ojeda, 2015). Beyond political participation, (Greenlee, 2014) demonstrates that motherhood will change the political attitudes of mothers over time. Taken together with the literature on crime victimization, the life changes literature and crime victimization literature draw clear lines between significant events in one's life and political outcomes. However, exactly how these lines form is not quite clear.

Politicization

The literature on sexual assault in non-American contexts, sexual harassment, crime and life changing events implies that sexual assault is something that can become politicized among those who experience it. Here, I will explain what it means for a concept to become politicized.

Politicization is an abstract concept that has been understood to mean different things to scholars depending on what they are discussing. Some scholars theorize politicization as a process by which the public opinion of previously neutral ideas becomes polarized along partisan lines, oftentimes due to the rhetoric of political elites. This is the case when thinking about things like climate change or everyday objects that obtain political meaning like an oat milk latte (Bolsen and Druckman, 2015; Gauchat, 2012; Lee, 2020) and is what is demonstrated in the current sexual harassment literature that shows liberals and conservatives think differently about sexual harassment (Jose, Fowler and Raj, 2019; Bankert, 2020; Craig and Cossette, 2020).

Identity scholars conceptualize politicization slightly differently, as they are not studying how already formed political groups assign political meaning to things, but how the groups themselves become politically charged. Campbell et al. (1960) first described a political identity as “when group members develop a similar set of political beliefs and adhere to group norms in support of a specific political party, candidate, policy issue or course of political action” (quoted in Huddy (2013), pg. 739). Huddy (2013) elaborates on this and contends that a social identity “can acquire meaning through the influence of group leaders who advocate certain beliefs and policy positions or take specific political action” to become a political identity. These identity scholars stress that an identity is only political when someone acts upon this group membership in a way that is politically consequential. Rather than groups becoming polarized in opinion about things, this conceptualization of politicization considers when an identity someone identifies with becomes politically consequential and becomes the lines upon which polarization can occur (for examples see: (Pérez, 2015; Gay, 2004; Conover, 1988). This is what we see in the literature on crime victimization where someone acts in a political way because of the event that they have experienced (Bateson, 2012; Blattman, 2009; Dorff,

2017).

Given that we already know that events related to sexual assault can develop political meaning (Bankert, 2020) and we know that there are concrete effects that emerge from victimization in comparative contexts, it is reasonable to assume that sexual assault itself could take on political meaning by those who experience. However, what remains less clear when exactly sexual assault will take on this meaning among those who experience it.

Why the current literature is not sufficient

So far, this chapter has worked to establish that sexual assault is a widespread problem with far reaching effects, and that it is possible these effects can extend to politics. However, while I can establish the idea that sexual assault and political behavior may be connected, current literature does not provide enough of a foundation to theorize what various reactions from sexual assault will create changes in political behavior and what specific attitudes or participatory variables should be affected.

First, the current literature on sexual violence outside of the American context tends to focus on sexual violence as a tool-of-war or strategy. Therefore, the theoretical foundations of these pieces are not applicable to contexts of active peacetime in a country. Additionally, the American literature on sexual harassment does not extend to sexual violence. This omission may be for various reasons, such as the timeliness of studying harassment in the wake of #MeToo and the methodological challenges that come from studying sexual assault (Koss et al., 2007). However, because sexual assault is a more violent event than harassment – we cannot be sure that the experiences function the same. The literature on sexual harassment also tends to focus on partisan interpretation of the concepts, rather than how assault or harassment itself affects subsequent political behavior. Considering the patriarchal roots of sexual assault (Kessel, 2022), it is important to consider that not only is partisanship shaping interpretation of assault– but that for women who have been through it, assault may also be shaping the political attitudes that form the basis for observable political outcomes like partisanship.

Second – regarding the crime literature and life changes literature - sexual assault is a unique experience that may operate differently due to the sometimes-invisible nature and unclear victimization signals that occur. Crimes like petty theft (Bateson, 2012) and violence (Blattman, 2009), while no doubt psychologically damaging, are crimes that victims can easily identify. The same goes for life changes like widowhood, marriage, and moving, where the change is very clear (Hobbs, Christakis and Fowler, 2014; Stoker and Jennings, 1995). Sexual assault does not always have these clear indications of victimhood or change. Survivors of sexual assault do not always immediately realize what happened to them, and it can take years of negotiating meaning to reach the conclusion that they were assaulted (Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings, 2010).

Psychology and sociology literature show that women have a hard time processing rape and often explain it away to protect their own mental state (Mason and Lodrick 2013, Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson 2018; Swanson and Szymanski 2020). Women are also not immune from internalizing rape myths (false beliefs about what is sexual assault)¹ that make it hard for them to understand what happened (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018). Additionally, the feelings of shame and embarrassment associated with sexual assault are not typically present in victims of other crimes (Weiss, 1994) and rape and sexual assault are routinely under-reported meaning that victims are less likely to get justice. The differences in processing and understanding of what happening among survivors can creates circumstances where there could be vastly different reactions and actions taken by women who experience sexual assault. These variations in reactions may be important when determining the actions someone takes.

Because the literature is under-theorized, I also turned to existing data to try and gain a landscape for what the connections between sexual assault and politics may be. However, existing data sets that ask questions about sexual assault do not ask about politics in American politics and vice versa, making it hard to examine any connections. While political data sets have started to ask about sexual harassment (such as the American National Election Studies), there are still no data sets that ask about sexual assault or rape. The lack of quality data surrounding this question makes it hard to even understand descriptively what the landscape around sexual assault and politics looks like and how connections between the two develop.

2.2 Grounded Theory

Because there is not enough literature to adequately theorize hypotheses about the connection between sexual assault and politics, and existing data does not allow for exploratory analyses, this project will first take a constructionist grounded theory approach as laid out in Charmaz (2014). A grounded theory approach adds an extra step to a research process. Instead of following the pattern of Research Question \Rightarrow Theory \Rightarrow Data Collection \Rightarrow Results, it follows pattern of Research Question \Rightarrow Data Collection \Rightarrow Theory \Rightarrow New Data Collection \Rightarrow Results. In simpler terms, it requires collecting data first to help develop a theory, and then continuing to test the theory that was derived from the first round of data collection. For this specific project, it will allow me to collect primary data from survivors of sexual assault that can help me theorize about why sexual assault and political behavior might be connected.

Constructionist grounded theory consists of collecting primary data sources (in this case, interviews with survivors of sexual assault) and systematically examining those interviews line by line to find commonalities and form a theory. It is a “systematic, yet flexible method for collecting and analyzing qualitative data” that

¹An example of a rape myth is that rape normally occurs in dark places by unknown people. Research shows that 90% of victims know their perpetrator in some way (*RAINN: Statistics, 2022*).

allows researchers to construct theory from the data itself (Charmaz 2014, p. 1). Constructionist grounded theory requires bringing an open mind to the data, and allowing the data itself to tell us what is happening by constantly studying, coding, comparing, and synthesizing the data. By coding and comparing the data, analytic questions and patterns can begin to emerge and provide a clearer conceptual picture of what is occurring (Charmaz, 2014). The intent of grounded theory is not to test a hypothesis, but to use this repetitive and in-depth process to generate ideas or hypotheses about a particular situation that is rooted in the perceptions and experiences of the participants (Komives et al., 2005).

2.3 Method: Semi-structured interviews

In this study, I have chosen to engage in semi-structured interviews with survivors of sexual assault that directly ask questions about one's experiences, interpretations of assault, and politics as the primary texts to derive and develop theories. Semi-structured interviews are a form of interviewing that consists of creating a set of open-ended questions (called an interview guide) that will ask respondents to talk about their political behavior, assault, and ways they may be connected, but also offers flexibility for the respondents to highlight what they think is important or should be noted. The semi-structured nature of these interviews does not require one to rigidly follow lines of questioning, but instead allows for deviation as the respondents point to new connections that the researcher may not have thought of before (Mason, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are the best method given the intent of the project because they allow one to explore both specific questions concerning the constructs around sexual assault, but also provide room for detail, depth and insight that a typical survey or even a fully structured interview cannot provide (Leech, 2002). By allowing for the material to evolve over the course of the interview, new ideas can emerge. Semi-structured interviews also give agency to the respondents to dictate what is important, therefore making sure I do not impose my own opinions of how someone should react or behave after an assault onto the respondents.

The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews is informed by existing literature surrounding trauma (Strauss Swanson and Szymanski, 2020), sexual assault and harassment (Jose, Fowler and Raj, 2019; Ullman, 1996) and political attitudes, identities and participation (Bateson, 2012; Blattman, 2009). Additionally, I collected and examined 43 publicly available interviews and articles with survivors of sexual assault in national news outlets such as TIME (Zacharek, Dockterman and Sweetland Edwards, 2017), Allure (Zipursky, 2020) and The New York Times (Ryzik, 2017) to guide the original questions. These interviews covered both elite actors, such as Taylor Swift and Gretchen Carlson, and local activists interviewed by local papers, to develop a sense of why these women were publicly speaking out and acting in a political way. By engaging in content analysis with these interviews, I was able to begin developing ideas on how someone comes to arrive at a political interpretation of their assault. However, these publicly available interviews were

not conducted for the purpose of directly understanding the link between politics and sexual assault, so while they provided a foundation for beginning to theorize, they could not provide a full understanding that would substitute for conducting my own interviews.

Below are some of the questions used in the interview guide. The full interview guide is in Appendix A. During the interviews, I asked most of the questions to most respondents, however, if the conversation took an important or interesting turn, I did not force it back to the interview guide. I also did not tend to ask the question 'Oftentimes we can dwell on the negatives of these events, and they truly are negative, but I am curious to know if there is anything you are proud about in the way that you have handled the event and moved forward in your life?' to the respondents because the positives tended to come up organically so it did not feel natural to the conversation.

- What were your initial feelings and reactions after the event?
- Did you tell anyone about this event?
- How do you interpret this event in terms of its causes? Has this changed over time?
- What does this event mean to you now?
- Do you feel that this event has influenced the way you interact with the world?

Before moving forward with the study description, I want to address the concern for ethics that went into the construction of the interview guide. Extreme care was taken to make sure that risks of participating in the interview were minimized for participants. Before engaging in interviews, I completed the course 'Trauma: Impact and Intervention' through Vanderbilt's Human Development and Counseling Program. This course is intended for those learning to become therapists and enabled me to take a trauma informed approach to the research. This class gave me the toolkit to understand how to structure conversations regarding trauma by starting with a warm-up period, moving into the substantive questions (above), and then providing a wind down period to transition individuals back into their day. This wind down period is unique to situations with trauma and is not always found in qualitative interviews. Whereas qualitative interviews do typically involve a wind-up period to gain rapport, the extra emphasis I put on transitioning someone back into their day ensured that risks are minimized. Before the interview respondents also engaged in an informed consent conversation, rather than just a statement, to ensure they knew their rights and were informed that they could stop the interview at any point in time.

Recruitment Process

Once the study passed through the full university IRB process², respondents were recruited through a purposive, online snowball sample using a social media flyer (included in Appendix A) asking for survivors of sexual assault³ to participate in an interview about political values and sexual assault. Purposive sampling consists of ‘sampling on meaning,’ where I select people precisely because they have the characteristics that I am looking for, rather than recruiting a representative sample and hoping some people have those characteristics (Luborsky and Rubenstein, 1995). By recruiting in this way, I can make sure that I have respondents who were exemplars of my phenomena (survivors of sexual assault) and could speak to the topic on hand - politics⁴. The flyer was originally posted to my own social media pages and was made public, so anyone who wanted to share the flyer would be able to do so.

A snowball sample is a way to gradually accumulate participants, starting with a few known members of the population of interest and then asking those participants to refer other participants to the study (Kuzel, 1999; Lynch, 2013). I chose a snowball sample because it is a good way to get participants from hard-to-reach groups, or groups that are ‘hidden’ from society in one way or another (Weiss, 1994). Survivors of sexual assault meet this criterion of a ‘hidden’ population because many people who experience sexual assault do not have a public persona as a survivor activist and avoid disclosing their status beyond a small group to avoid stigmatization from society (Ullman, 1996). By utilizing the private networks (ie: people such as friends and families that are close to the individuals and have experienced sexual assault as well) that form between survivors I may be able to get more individuals to feel comfortable participating in a study about sexual assault than they may be otherwise. It is important to note that while the study is utilizing my social networks, I had no previous relationship or contact with any of the respondents before our interview took place. In the end, the flyer was shared at least 26 on times of Facebook and 24 times on Instagram. For a conservative estimate, say that each person who shared it has 25 unique followers – this means that the flyer received at least an estimate of 1,250 views online.

Participants

Overall, 26 women contacted me to participate in the study and 16 of these contacts resulted in a completed interview⁵. The women range in age from 21-45 and are mostly white, middle to upper-middle class, cis-gender and highly educated. For qualitative studies, respondents should be interviewed until it appears that no new information is being gleaned from additional respondents. When I reached 16 respondents and

²This study went through a full IRB review at Vanderbilt University and was approved on 10/30/2021, IRB #211756.

³I choose to use the term sexual assault rather than rape due to the stigma that surrounds rape, knowing that by using sexual assault rather than rape I would be able to talk to a wider range of people

⁴For an example of a similar method see: Mosley et al. (2021).

⁵This is a typical amount for a grounded theory study. Mosley et al. (2021) recruited 10 participants, Strauss Swanson and Szymanski (2020) recruited 16 and Komives et al. (2005) recruited 5 people for 3 interviews, totaling 15 interviews.

evaluated the data, it appeared that there were consistent patterns among the respondents - indicating that additional respondents would not bring new information. This reflects the qualitative research idea of hitting saturation, meaning that additional information brought in by respondents does not necessarily reveal any new information to the researcher.

Because I did not deliberately seek a representative group of people, the respondents themselves represent my own network, younger, white, liberal, upper-middle class and highly educated, in comparison to the demographics of the nation. The respondents having similar demographics is a risk that one takes with a snowball sample and is something that could be re-thought or improved in a future iteration of the study (Bleich and Pekkanen, 2013).

Since the demographics are not representative of the population, it is important to stop and think about the scope conditions of the interviews and what/whom my interviews can generate ideas about. Because most of my respondents are younger, white, middle class, liberal women, the ideas generated will reflect how sexual assault affects women who occupy this social status. As someone diverges from these demographics along the dimensions of age, race, class, and partisanship, it is possible that what I discover through my grounded theory does not reflect their experience. Therefore, it is important that I can identify within my grounded theory what ideas form because of the common age, race, class, and partisanship status of the participants with the understanding that some of my findings may not generalize to other populations.

For example, rape can have different meanings and implications for Black women as compared to White women. Black women have been historically forced into a narrow definition of femininity that legitimizes violence against them in a way that does not exist for white women (Collins, 2004; Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018). This damaging image of Black women can discourage them from reporting being raped by White men for fear that they will not be believed. Black women may also be discouraged from reporting their rape if the perpetrator is Black because they may be accused of putting their own needs in front of the Black community (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018). Additionally, there are many historical instances where White women in consensual relationships with Black men have accused the man of rape when their relationship was discovered, complicating the relationship with reporting for the whole Black community (Bevacqua, 2000). These historical features may make it so that Black women politicize sexual assault in a different way than white women, or at the very least, have additional considerations they must consider when making decisions around their sexual assault.

Because my respondents are mostly white, as a researcher it is important that I acknowledge and understand where my theory may or may not apply to different populations. It is my hope that this project is a step towards building a research portfolio that I, and other researchers, can continue to contribute to and grow over time that accounts for many different dimensions and variations of people who have experienced sexual

assault.

Interview Process and Participant Response

All interviews took place over the Zoom app, though local respondents were given the opportunity to conduct a face-to-face interview if they preferred. The interviews ranged from a length of 70 minutes (1 hour and 10 minutes) to 105 minutes (1 hour and 45 minutes). Interviews took place from December 2021 to February 2022. Participants were all compensated with a \$25 gift card to their choice of Amazon, Starbucks, Target, or Walmart as a thank you for their participation.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in real time using Otter.ai, a secure transcription phone app. To ensure confidentiality, I started recording the transcript after introductions and consent to record was obtained. This ensures that the names of the respondents were never said during the interview unless the respondent said it themselves. Once the interview was completed, I exported the audio and transcript and then deleted them from the app so that the only copies of the transcripts and audio are on the password protected hard drive of my computer and a password protected external hard drive⁶. This data management method was approved by the IRB and makes sure no personally identifying information was stored on the internet to continue to protect the privacy of my respondents.

Once the interview was exported, I would listen to the audio and review the transcripts to make sure that they were correct before any analysis was conducted. While Otter.ai provided a great start to automated transcripts, they were not 100 percent correct, so it was important to review the transcripts for accuracy. For example, when asking a respondent to describe what she thought of American politics, she replied “it is a hot mess”. Otter.ai picked this audio up as “it is happiness.” The qualitative difference between these two meanings highlights why it was important to review the transcripts created by Otter.ai so that accurate analysis could take place. Names and identifying information were also removed from the transcripts.

Overall, respondents seemed pleased to participate in the study. It is important to acknowledge that there were selection effects among the respondents, as these women chose to directly contact me. There were two instances when women did cry during their interview, and I assured them that we could stop if they wished, though no one stopped the interview prematurely. No respondent told me that they regretted participating in the interview at the end, with the majority expressing that they were thankful for the opportunity to participate and allow their experience to contribute to something. While it is never ideal to have respondents cry when participating in the research, the overall positive feedback from the respondents gives me confidence in the fact that I did not further burdening those who I interviewed. As of the final writing of the dissertation, no

⁶Correspondence with the developers of Otter.ai confirmed that once something is deleted from the app, it is no longer stored in the cloud and is not accessible even with a data breach.

respondent has reached out to express any sort of regret in participating or to redact anything that they said during their interview. Rather, the only correspondence with respondents after the interviews were additional emails where respondents emphasized their satisfaction in participating. I will also be emailing a completed copy of the dissertation to respondents who indicated during the interview that they would like to receive it.

2.4 Data Analysis: The Process of Grounded Theory

Qualitative Coding Process

To analyze the qualitative interview data, I engaged in a three-pass qualitative coding process of the interviews. The first pass is called Descriptive coding, followed by Focused coding and then the last pass is Theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). All coding was done in qualitative coding software NVivo.

Descriptive coding is the first step. Descriptive, or initial coding, is the simplest form of coding where each unit of text is given a small summary to reflect what is happening in the text. To engage in descriptive coding, each interview was examined by units of single sentences or groups of sentences that reflected a single idea (Komives et al., 2005) with a simple word or phrase. This code reflects no interpretation and is simply an indicator of what is occurring in the data at that point (Charmaz, 2014). By initially coding the data without imposing any interpretation on to it, there is a starting point for understanding what is happening in the data and ideas can begin to form. After the process was completed, there were 745 unique descriptive codes created - some examples are “didn’t realize it was assault at the time” and “care more about women’s rights”.

Next was focused coding. Focused coding is the process of studying and organizing the initial codes into thematic categories that can start to account for the data (Charmaz, 2014). Here, one begins analyzing the information in a way that starts to impose some meaning to the data (Charmaz, 2014). To stay consistent with constructivist grounded theory, one must pay attention to what the codes imply and reveal, allowing the data itself to create the categories and codes rather than forcing it into categories. Given the integrative and comparative aspect of grounded theory, new and possibly unexpected, focused codes can emerge over time, and codes that appeared important at one point can eventually fall off. Through focused coding, the data produces a set of codes that have ‘greater analytic power’ than those created in the initial coding stage (Charmaz, 2014). These codes will form the core of what eventually becomes the analysis of the concepts, revealing the direction of what may be theoretically important. Not every code from the initial, descriptive stage will become part of a focused code. Some examples of these focused codes are: “talking to process (Therapy)”, “more empathy/care more about people in general” and “afraid of consequences of disclosing”. In these codes, some interpretation is applied. Ultimately, there were 26 focused codes created and not every descriptive code ended up in a focused code category.

While the coding was replicated in NVivo afterwards, I initially did focused coding by physically cutting out all the codes and then grouped them together on my floor. Physically sorting the focused codes made sure that for each code I was able to consider the groupings each individual code could fit into in a way that was more efficient and visual for my purposes by not continually scrolling through lists on a screen. This is not a necessary element for creating focused codes but was something I found helpful in the process and may be helpful to future researchers with unwieldy amounts of descriptive codes.

The last stage of my coding process was theoretical coding. Theoretical coding was first conceptualized by Glaser (1978) (referenced in (Charmaz, 2014)). In this stage, one starts to put ideas together and form hypotheses. This process involves theorizing how the focused codes are connected, integrating the codes together to tell a story (Charmaz, 2014). The idea here is that these theoretical codes what underlie the focused codes and are what bring them together (Charmaz, 2014).

The method around Theoretical Coding remains somewhat ambiguous Charmaz (2014), so I have chosen to follow the ideas of the Six C's (Glaser 1978) which means looking for "Causes, Contexts, Contingencies, Consequences, Covariances, and Conditions" that lead to the focused codes and tie them together. For example: the code: "Sexual Assault needs to be understood as something caused/treated in the political system – need to connect sexual assault and politics for it to matter" tries to create a cause (understood in the political system) and a consequence (for it to matter). This code demonstrates how codes are being causally linked to the main dependent variable to try and form some type of hypothesis.

Both Glaser and Charmaz caution that over-reliance on the structure can prevent one from seeing a larger theoretical code emerge that does not fit into the structure. Therefore, while I use these categories as a guideline, I continue to engage in comparing and evaluating codes in way that will allow for larger theoretical codes to emerge that do not fit these exact categories. As with focused coding, it is important to remember the comparative and interactive part of theoretical coding, constantly comparing existing and new codes that emerge and allowing for the code to change and evolve as new information is obtained.

Once the theoretical codes are determined, diagramming takes place to determine how these codes all fit together on a larger scale, hopefully providing an emergent theory that is constructed from the analyzed data. This process resulted in six thematic codes. These codes reflected six ideas:

- Political System Attribution (or how one places blame) affects subsequent political actions.
- Attending Therapy allows for more processing and can increase ability to make political connections.
- Survivor/Victim Identity leads to more empathy and understanding.
- Emotions can help determine political outcomes (anger and fear would result in different outcomes).

- The Role of Support System is consequential.
- External Environment and cues (such as celebrities) – This idea is more relevant to ideas of #MeToo and suggests that the media environment and cues one is hearing from elites can help to further determine the political behavior.

Moving forward, the dissertation will focus on three of these thematic codes: Political System Attribution, Attending Therapy, and Survivor/Victim Identity. These codes were chosen as the focus of the dissertation mainly because they represent new and novel ideas that could provide contributions to the political science literature. Below, I will briefly discuss each theory not explored in the dissertation before moving on to the theories that I will focus on.

First, the Support System theme reflects the fact who women disclose and the reaction that they receive to the disclosure may influence subsequent political behavior. Psychology literature supports the idea that when women receive negative or minimizing reactions to disclosure, it can increase the negative side effects they experience (Ullman, 1996; Ahrens et al., 2007; Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings, 2010). Alternatively, when women are supported and believed by the people they disclose to, they have less negative side effects that emerge. I chose not to pursue this specific theme due to the nuance that would be needed to study it. This study would require a network analysis that gathers how many people the survivors disclose to, how the people reacted and even how much time elapsed in between the assault and the disclosure. Simply put, analyzing the networks and support systems of survivors would be a whole dissertation by itself – so by not pursuing this line and leaving it to future researchers I can examine more of the themes discovered.

Second, the emotions reflect the fact that the different emotions someone has after assault – anger, fear, sadness, indifference – will affect the behavior of survivors differently. I chose not to pursue this code simply because I did not feel as if it would be making a novel contribution in the same way that the others would. Instead, it would be building on and supporting an already established line of literature that demonstrates anger is mobilizing and fear is demobilizing (Valentino et al., 2011). Given the amount of work I did for the semi-structured interviews, I felt it was a better use of time and a better intellectual challenge to examine variables that less is known about.

The last theme I am not pursuing in this dissertation is the role of elites and celebrities in shaping the information environment. This theme derives directly from #MeToo and reflects the idea that as women see more cues from celebrities about sexual assault and other elites, they may change their political participation as well. For example, when women see Taylor Swift come forward and discuss her assault on social media survivors who are not elites may also feel more compelled to say something on social media. I chose not to pursue this theme because I wanted to keep the focus of the dissertation on the mass public, rather than elite

figures. Additionally, I think there would be weaker effects currently than if this study had been conducted at the beginning of #MeToo. Examining the effect of celebrities on real life behavior would be more useful when prominent celebrities are actively discussing their assaults.

Coding Memos and Transparency

Compared to quantitative work, qualitative work is much harder to replicate. To ensure that my work is accessible to other researchers, detailed notes and coding memos were kept over the course of the study⁷ Through the coding process, I created a running document of coding memos. Keeping a document of coding memos is a way to create systematic documentation of the codes created and a ‘diary’ of what I was thinking while I was working. In this document, I wrote down what I did each day. As each new code was created, I would write a description of the code and make sure that the code did not already exist. As a result, if it is necessary, I can go back and see exactly on what date and in what interview a code originated. This allows for transparency in the coding process if other scholars want to review. The coding memos also allowed for me to start developing thoughts, so if I started to see a pattern emerge while I was coding, I made a note entry to capture it. These detailed coding memos enable me to be transparent and accurate when observing the history of the evolution of my thoughts throughout the process.

2.5 Main Theories

Now that I have laid out how these semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed to lead to the theory development, the rest of the chapter will present the theories that were derived from this interview process. First, the main hypotheses and independent variables developed from three of the thematic codes are presented and justified within Political Science literature alongside quotes from the interviews to demonstrate the concepts. Next, the dependent variables used in the project are presented with quotes.

2.5.1 Theory 1: Political System Attribution

The first theory that I will explore is what I am calling Political System Attribution- or the idea women must hold politics as something that is responsible for either the cause or solution to sexual assault for it to affect their political behavior. Because people process sexual assault differently (Mason and Lodrick, 2013), they will also develop different understandings of why the assault happened. Whereas some women will see politics as responsible based on their own circumstances, others will not. This theory does not have to mean that someone thinks that politics are the only avenue for addressing sexual assault. However, it does mean

⁷While full transcripts of the interviews cannot be released unless my IRB and the other researchers IRBs are approved, I am happy to share my coding memos with any researcher interested. This provides an opportunity for scholars to add their own interpretations to my categories and codes and see if their own interpretations align with my own, as well as see the systematic documentation of the codes over time.

that if someone does not think politics as a concept is at least partly responsible for the occurrence of sexual assault or at least partly responsible for solving the problem, they will not update their political behavior even if they were assaulted.

The idea of Political System Attribution is consistent with political science literature that shows when individuals hold government or society responsible for a problem, they are more willing to take political action versus when they attribute responsibility to individuals or uncontrollable forces (Iyengar, 1996; Jang, 2013; Arceneaux and Stein, 2006). On the other hand, when individuals make attributions that are more rooted in individual actions, their political behavior is less likely to be affected. For example, Arceneaux and Stein (2006) show that after a flood, people are more likely to punish an incumbent mayor if there was not previous flood preparation. However, when there was preparation or preparation is not mentioned, the flood is blamed on uncontrollable forces and the mayor is not punished. In terms of sexual assault, individual or uncontrollable attributions could emerge when people blame either the perpetrator ('he is evil'), the victim ('she was wearing revealing clothing'), outside forces ('they were both drunk, it was no one's fault' or 'technology normalizes sexual assault') or other individuals ('his family never taught him right from wrong'), in comparison to political or societal forces ('laws do not punish perpetrators enough', 'rape culture and patriarchy reinforce the idea that men can do this with no consequence').

The following quotes are from three respondents with different views, one who displays a political attribution and two who do not. First, Kaitlyn models a respondent attributing causal responsibility to rape culture, which subsequently affects her political behavior. For causal attribution, women who express that they understand that rape is a result of deep-rooted systems of patriarchy, called rape culture, demonstrate a political understanding of the cause ⁸.

On the other hand, Courtney demonstrates attribution of responsibility elsewhere. Courtney first describes how she sees issues of sexuality as separate from politics, and then attributes responsibility to the family and how children are raised. While Courtney does see sexual assault as a problem, she does not see politics as the cause or as an appropriate realm for treatment, and therefore it does not affect her political behavior. Last, Rebecca also demonstrates attribution elsewhere by talking about how she sees the issue as rooted in the family – like Courtney. While she does think that there is something larger with how men are raised, Rebecca sees it more as an individual responsibility for parents to teach their children rather than attributing the blame to something larger like rape culture.

⁸Kessel (2022) traces the historical, political roots of “rape culture” and how rape culture is a deeply political concept rooted in systemic domination. Rape, and subsequently the idea of rape culture, took on political meaning starting in the 1970’s when radical feminists began talking about rape not as an individual problem, but as part of a larger system of domination of men over women and fought back through events like speak outs and rallies (Kessel, 2022). This idea can be seen documented in (Brownmiller, 1975) ‘Against our Will’, a seminal work on rape that first introduced the idea that rape is not about sexual desire, but power and desire to control women. Over time, thoughts of rape culture have grown to take on more intersectional lenses that understand that systems of dominance exist not just between men and women, but are intersectional along lines of race, sexuality and class (Kessel, 2022).

“[The cause is]I would say a boy who... a man who enacted rape culture... But I would say the cause is that he ignored my no, the cause is that he ignored me. And all of those things are rape culture and also personal choices within that.”

- Kaitlyn

“How I feel about drinking or having sex, I know a lot of people want to mix that with politics, but I don’t. Those things don’t interact with my political beliefs.”... It’s [sexual assault] an issue...I think in the end, it’s everyone’s choice and you have to genuinely want to raise your own kids and not let a tablet raise them.”

- Courtney

“I try and teach my boys to be good men. I want them to be good men when they grow up, and I think that a lot of that is if they if they learn how to be good sons, and how to take care of mom, I think that that makes them into good men. And they’ll one day learn how to be a good husband or a good boyfriend. That’s very important for them to understand that their actions can bring joy and comfort to someone, and it can also do the opposite.”

- Rebecca

Kaitlyn explicitly calls out rape culture as a cause for sexual assault. However, Political System Attribution can also be more subtle or can manifest in solutions. Below are quotes from two respondents - Michelle and Faye – that do not explicitly say that rape culture is the cause of sexual assault. Instead, they state or imply that the political system is a place to act – suggesting Michelle and Faye see politics as a relevant place and venue to address issues of sexual assault and are attributing some responsibility for solutions to politics. Faye confidently states that her assault is something that shapes how she understands politics. Michelle displays Political System Attribution by demonstrating a systematic understanding of oppression towards women, and then using that understanding when making political decisions that will affect women.

For solution attribution, women who express that ‘Organizing against rape culture’ or ‘Creating laws and policies meant to reduce, protect, or help survivors of sexual assault’ could reduce sexual assault will be counted as possessing treatment attribution, because these answers are directly calling on political action to address the prevalence of sexual assault. Therefore, as women endorse more of these statements, attributing more responsibility to the political system, they should become more likely to change their political behavior.

“I think [the assault] definitely has only enhanced the way I understand and engage with [politics].”

- Faye

“I see other women in my life, picking up their bags and going moving to different states. And I just, I really love that freedom of going anywhere you want, starting up a job, whatever you are competent in and passionate about. And not having to get the approval of someone else before you go and do those things.”

- Michelle

“A big thing for me was seeing how [Trump] talked about women. . . . that was difficult for me to see. And obviously, that made a difference in how I voted the next time around.”

- Michelle

Unlike Kaitlyn, Michelle and Faye do not explicitly call out rape culture. However, I imagine that for most women, Political System Attribution looks more like Michelle and Faye’s version than Kaitlyn’s. For these women, what is important is not necessarily that they can name ‘rape culture’ or say outright that they want to campaign for legal change, but that after their assault the way they see politics as a solution to the problem of sexual assault. This connection, or stronger connection, between politics and sexual assault may be consequential and move the women to act in ways that reflect that they care more about women’s issues and sexual assault.

The grounded theory reveals that political system attribution should move respondents in a more liberal direction on policy views related to women’s bodily autonomy and political participation, especially concerning women’s rights. This is consistent with the idea of issue publics, meaning that because they were assaulted and see it as political, the women will be more emboldened to act in ways that represent their group and create that change (Krosnick, 1990; Huddy, 2013).

H1: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attribute responsibility for their assault to the political system will be more liberal on public policies related to women’s bodily autonomy and sexual assault than people who have been sexually assaulted who do not attribute any responsibility to the political system.

H2: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attribute responsibility for their assault to the political system will participate in politics concerning women’s rights more than women who do not attribute responsibility for the assault to the political system.

2.5.2 Theory 2: Attending Therapy

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is how attending therapy can facilitate processing and understanding of the assault. Therapy or counseling is a process that allows individuals to reflect on their experiences, develop coping skills, and process meaning in a safe and healthy environment (Hofmann et al. 2012; Feldman et al. 2009). Therapy can also facilitate post-traumatic growth (Cowan, Ashai and Gentile, 2020), which has been linked to increased political participation in political science (Blattman, 2009). Because therapy facilitates this high-level processing and growth, it could cause women to think more about how their experience connects to their political views and preferences, as well as their political participation. Like Political System Attribution, attending therapy should move respondents in the liberal direction. This liberal move should come because they women will be reflecting on their own bodily autonomy being violated and may become more motivated to align with politics in a way that is actively opposed to this violation rather than being silent or actively opposed to women's rights in the way that conservatism has become aligned with.

The quotes from respondents below demonstrate how therapy seems to facilitate this processing. First, an activist, Sienna, demonstrates growth in ability to talk about and comprehend her experience after attending therapy. Callie then explicitly says that therapy kick-started her recovery process and Michelle discusses how it helped her to talk through things she did not necessarily feel comfortable talking about with her close friends or family members.

“I have had the fortunate experience of going to trauma therapy and so I did not acknowledge it [the rape] until more than a year later. . . It [the therapy] was brutal... And then magically, by the end of it, I was able to tell the story without feeling anything. So, you know, it was very difficult during, but like, the aftermath has been amazing.”

- Sienna

“I got to the point where I was like, I need to talk with somebody about this because it's like affecting my life in a negative way and it actually I mean, that is probably what kick started my recovery process from. . . it was being able to talk about it with somebody who wasn't part of my family or my social group.”

- Callie

“I was really, like, apprehensive of going, because I don't think I needed it kind of thing. Or I thought it was just “weird” to do that. I know, it's not. But I was just, like, kind of scared to go,

but decided to go last semester just online. . . . So, I went once last year, I thought it was good. And I just I started going again this year, like, every other week. And I realized how much it helped me like talk things through things that maybe I didn't want to spill on my own family, who I usually will talk about a lot of things with.”

- Michelle

Because therapy facilitates this high-level growth, those who do not attend therapy may be less likely to engage in processing and thinking about meaning of their assault. Ullman, Peter-Hagene and Relyea (2014) demonstrates sexual assault survivors who engage in adaptive coping mechanisms (such as seeking help) experience more post-traumatic growth than those who engage in maladaptive coping mechanisms (heavy drinking, disassociating). While Ullman, Peter-Hagene and Relyea (2014) aggregate these adaptive coping mechanisms and does not isolate the effect of therapy specifically, the study does suggest more processing occurs among those who engage in active and productive measures. Additionally, not attending therapy may make it harder for someone to even admit that an assault happened. In a study of sexual assault survivors Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings (2010) find that about 20% of survivors will take over 3.5 years to disclose their rape to anyone (whether that be friends, medical professionals or therapists). This delayed reaction time by some survivors is because their rape falls into a more 'non-traditional' attack, meaning that their rape did not follow the rape myth of the stranger in the dark attacking an innocent victim and could involve more nuance such as an existing relationship between the perpetrator and victim or substance use ⁹. Attending therapy and processing traumatic situations, even if the person does not consider it to be assault at the time, could create circumstances where people are more able to come to terms with what happened to them and subsequently engage in more behavioral changes.

H3: Women who have been sexually assaulted who have been to therapy will be more likely to attribute responsibility to the political system than women who have been sexually assaulted who have not been to therapy.

H4: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attend therapy will have more liberal attitudes on public policies related to women's bodily autonomy than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not attend therapy.

H5: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attend therapy will express more empathy towards oppressed groups than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not attend therapy.

⁹Though, it is important to point out that this 'non-traditional' attack is actually way more common than the stranger in the dark rape myth. *RAINN: Statistics* (2022) reports that 8 out of 10 survivors know their rapist. This is consistent with findings from the semi-structured interviews in this project, where every respondent had some sort of existing relationship (though not all were intimate, some were friends or acquaintances) with their attacker.

2.5.3 Theory 3: Survivor/Victim Identity

The next independent variable that can emerge among women who have experienced sexual assault is the formation of an identity as a ‘Survivor’ or a ‘Victim’. While there are semantic discussions about what the labels ‘Survivor’ and ‘Victim’ mean, and if the distinction matters, both terms are adopted by individuals who are sexually assaulted and most individuals who self-identify with one label also identify on some level with the other (Boyle and Rogers, 2020). Both labels are also used in professional practice. The largest anti-sexual violence organization in the United States, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), emphasizes that individuals have the choice to determine which label they want to use, and that the label chosen by the person should be respected (*RAINN: Key Terms and Phrases*, 2022).

Rather than focusing on a specific label, what is important is choosing to label oneself as part of a group in general or as Kaitlyn says, “one of many”. By engaging in self-labeling as a Victim or Survivor, the individual is demonstrating a psychological attachment to others who are in the group in the most basic sense based on a similar experience (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Scholars have concretely shown that there are psychological benefits from labeling oneself as a Survivor or Victim. In studies of the ‘Survivor’ label, Newsom and Myers-Bowman (2017) and Boyle (2017) show that identifying as a Survivor creates less severe psychological symptoms of depression and PTSD in comparison to those who do not adopt the label. While there is research that shows that there are negative effects from identifying as a “Victim” (Boyle and Clay-Warner, 2018), other research is less conclusive. Boyle and Rogers (2020) find that a majority of people identify as both a Survivor and a Victim, and that they have less severe psychological symptoms than those who identify as neither.

The following quotes from respondents, Kaitlyn and Tara, demonstrate the idea that identifying as a victim or survivor provides them with some sort of psychological benefit that could subsequently affect political behavior. Kaitlyn self-identifies as a victim, but first discusses the psychological process of identifying as one of many before she even gave herself that label. Eventually, Kaitlyn adopted the label of a “victim” due to her feeling connected to others who have been in similar positions and allows it to impact her views towards others. Tara demonstrates similar thinking, discussing how the #MeToo movement helped her realize that she was part of something larger and helped her to form an identity as a Survivor. That identity is now an important part of who she is as a person.

“Yeah, like to be honest, [the sexual assault] helped me to identify as one of many. It helped me to say, I’m not the only one...The reason “Victim” means so much to me as an identifier is that for the first time of my life, I think I felt in solidarity with other people who struggled and have been victims of systems of oppression”

- Kaitlyn

“I didn’t post anything online [during #MeToo]. But I did talk to more of my friends and my family about my experience. And even though I didn’t post anything online at the time, I think that like, it was honestly a catalyst for a lot of my healing as a sexual assault survivor. And I think, probably two or so years after, maybe three years after the MeToo movement launched, I became really comfortable owning my identity. I talk about [being a Survivor] all the time now... I think I’m so much more comfortable with that part of me.”

- Tara

Here, Kaitlyn demonstrates that she can understand the oppression of others more and Tara demonstrates that she is more willing to discuss sexual assault with others, an important political participation item.

The idea that identifying as a Survivor can influence participation because it makes someone feel closer to other is also demonstrated by Sienna. Here, Sienna, who identified as a survivor repeatedly during her interview discusses how her own identity led her to go to an art exhibit about sexual assault. Here, her identity not only leads her to go to the exhibit – but to leave with a feeling of closeness to her friend and others in the room based on her own identity. Additionally, Beth displays that an identity as a survivor can also how much she pays attention to politics and ultimately her preference for politicians.

“I went actually went through that exhibit with one of my best friends who [is] also a survivor. And it left me in tears because I felt like so heard. There was so much solidarity in that room. It was a really, really such great experience going through that with her.”

- Sienna

“I think that my identity now as a survivor has opened up my ears if you will, to being a bit more woke about things surrounding sexual assault. About how politicians are ruling things either for or against the female body, or the baby carrying body.”

- Beth

The quotes from Kaitlyn Tara, Sienna and Beth are consistent with literature that shows that identities have strong influences over political attitudes and political participation (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017) and that social identities can be especially important considering trauma and political

actions (Marsh, 2022). The identity formation in Kaitlyn, Tara, Sienna, and others, leads to the following hypotheses.

H6: Women who have been sexually assaulted who self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim will have more liberal attitudes on policies related to women's bodily autonomy and freedom than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim.

H7: Women who have been sexually assaulted who self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim will express more empathy towards oppressed groups than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim.

H8: Women who have been sexually assaulted who self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim will participate in politics concerning women's rights more than people who do not self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim.

2.6 Outcomes

The theories derived from the semi-structured interviews propose specific ways that sexual assault may be connected to political behavior. The following section discusses in more detail which political attitudes, views towards oppressed groups and political participation actions may be affected and the appropriate outcome measures.

2.6.1 Political Attitudes

Public policy attitudes are more susceptible to change based on experiences than more deeply held political orientations such as ideology and partisanship (Greenlee, 2014). These policies also have direct political implications and are therefore a good test to see if experiencing a sexual assault takes on political meaning in the political behavior of individuals. Specifically, my interviews revealed that individuals may change their political attitudes toward policies concerning women's bodily autonomy and freedom. The following quotes from Frances and Adrianna demonstrate that they became more liberal and started to care more about abortion and sex education respectively after their assaults.

"I always had that belief system [pro-choice] before this all happened. But now that it happened to me, it's...I feel just as strong if not stronger about it, and it makes me want to be an even stronger and louder advocate for women's rights and a woman's right to choose, and abortion access."

- Frances

“[The assault] made me focus more in on topics like abuse and like women’s rights... I think it’s made me focus more and try to, learn and read into things [on] that type of topic over other things.”

-Adrianna

Beyond policy attitudes, some respondents indicated that sexual assault plays a role in determining their opinions towards politicians. In the interviews, these respondents indicated that they were more sensitive to accusations of assault against politicians than before their assaults, as demonstrated with Shannon below. This concept was also echoed by Rebecca – who acknowledged that even though she remains apolitical, she automatically does not trust a politician accused of sexual assault.

“I think I’ve become a lot more sensitive to comments people say, and things that people do and their behavior and how that can be a violation of other people’s autonomy of their own bodies. I think it’s made me a lot more sensitive to the way I view politicians and how I accept some of their behavior. I feel like, even with Biden- there’s knowledge that he is a little creepy with women and it’s kind of like, how much do you justify? And I feel like that’s something that I’ve had to really think about more pointedly when I evaluate who I’m voting for.”

- Shannon

“[A politician being accused of sexual assault] definitely makes you feel like that person isn’t trustworthy, it is not someone that you want making decisions for you when they’re capable of that.”

- Rebecca

These quotes suggest that women should become more liberal on issues towards women’s bodily autonomy and will care more when politicians are accused of sexual assault when they are activated to care about sexual assault from one of the independent variables of Political System Attribution, Attending Therapy or a Survivor/Victim Identity.

2.6.2 Support for Oppressed Groups

Another important attitude that repeatedly emerged over my conversations with the respondents was an increased support for oppressed groups that the person is not a member of. In the interviews, most respondents indicated that experiencing sexual assault was something that shifted their worldview and gave them a new

lens through which to view politics. Specifically, after their assault, respondents indicated caring more about groups such as Black people and LGBTQ+ people. The increased empathy may reflect an increased realization that they are part of an oppressed group and offers a new lens through which to view oppression. This may be a phenomenon that is especially prominent in White women who do not come face to face with their oppression as much as women with intersectional identities and may be processing personal oppression for the first time after their assault (Kessel, 2022). By gaining this new lens, women are better understanding other types of systematic oppression that they do not personally experience. This is displayed in the quotes from my respondents Bella, Elle, Beth and Riley.

“And that [the assault] brought up the whole like, I’ve been in my little white feminist bubble, and I’ve been so caught up in my own shit that I didn’t realize how much everyone else is having to deal with. And so, my experience navigating the worst things that people can do because you’re a woman makes me see things in a different light when I see the struggles of Black people, of indigenous people, of trans people.”

- Elle

“Before [the assaults] I was like, ‘Okay, maybe we shouldn’t be racist and we shouldn’t be homophobic and we should be like, nice, people.’ And now I’m like, ‘No. I want socialism. I want borderline communism because we deserve better’... And I understand my own privilege a lot more because I am a petite white woman that has access to education and access to health care and access to all these resources. And after him, I have become acutely aware that I have those resources and that a lot of other women he abused did not... Yeah, so, resources for everyone, especially survivors.”

-Bella

“I think that it’s definitely made me look into things a little bit deeper and see where others or any other governing people lean when it comes to women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, like all of those sort of minorities and underdogs. Because somebody has to speak for us and I’m really hoping that it’s somebody that also believes in abortions, or that a man shouldn’t be able to say what a woman can do with their body.”

- Beth

“So, I honestly think that it’s sounds really weird to say, but it’s definitely a world of good because it’s turned me into a person that can number one empathize, with people that have been through trauma . . . And I think it’s easier for me to understand why people cope the way they do when other people are like, ‘Well, why would you do that? That’s not what I would do if that happened to me.’ And . . . I think that it’s turning into a much more empathetic and compassionate person.

- Riley

Empathy is the idea that someone can take the perspective of someone and understand how the other person may feel, even though the individual may not have been in the same situation themselves (de Waal, 2008). While empathetic ability is most commonly used as an independent variable, such as with Feldman et al. (2020) who show that those who are higher in empathetic ability tend to have more liberal social policy positions, it has also been used as a dependent variable to show how experiences can shape empathetic ability in a political sense. This is shown most strongly in Hartman and Morse (2020) who proposed the concept of “Empathy borne from Violence” by showing that victims of violence in Liberia are more likely to help outgroup refugees than those who have not experienced violence. Additionally, Sirin, Valentino and Villalabos (2017) propose Group Empathy Theory, which states that individuals who are members of an oppressed group will support members of another oppressed group, even when the groups are in competition for resources with each other. Sirin, Valentino and Villalabos (2017) theorize that Group Empathy emerges because groups have similar experiences, so even if they are not exactly the same, it is easier for a member of minority group A to put themselves in the shoes of minority group B than someone who is not a member of a minority group at all. While they do not directly speak to trauma, an increased understanding of the effects of traumatic experiences could be one of these similar experiences that increases ability to put oneself in the shoes of another minority group.

The quotes and connected literatures suggest that the proposed mechanisms in the first part of this chapter – Attending Therapy and a Survivor/Victim Identity – may create this increased empathy in survivors of sexual assault.

2.6.3 Political Participation

The last dependent variable that may be affected by the independent variables is political participation specifically concerning women’s rights. Scholars have demonstrated that experiences of violence can lead to increased political participation (Bateson, 2012; Blattman, 2009). Specifically, victims of violence will increase their political participation in ways that are relevant to their victimization experiences (Bateson, 2012).

One possible reason for why this participation increases may be because women enter an issue public about issues of women's bodily autonomy and freedom. Issue publics are the idea that there are small subsets of populations who care about a particular set of issues, and that these individuals will be the most likely to mobilize around the issue, whereas others continue to ignore the or are indifferent about them (Krosnick, 1990). These issue publics become the lines upon which political participation can be based. For example, both Highton (2004) and Abramowitz (1995) find that the abortion policy views of candidates matter more for people who care about abortion than those who do not care about them and Iyengar et al. (2008) shows that voters will choose to seek out political information on issues that are the most relevant to them. Additionally, Bolsen and Leeper (2013) also find that even when someone is relatively uninformed about politics, they still access news sources that gives them relevant information about the issues they do care about. Altogether, the idea of issue publics suggests that when someone belongs to an issue public, their political participation could increase because they care about something in a way that other Americans may not.

The emergence of an issue public suggests that women will specifically participate more because of the new attitudes and intensity that they develop that puts them into an issue public surrounding women's bodily autonomy. Two interview respondents, Sienna and Adrianna, demonstrate this increased attention, intensity, and subsequently participation by speaking out at town hall events about sexual assault and sex education.

“I was very vocal at the time on [big sexual assault case]. I remember distinctly we had a town hall event. And so, I expressed [at the town hall] how I would never, kind of, go to the Title 9 office on campus and stuff and I was like, “this is a severe issue”. I actually ended up getting put on CNN. That was really cool.”

- Sienna

“At a [school board] meeting a couple months ago, I spoke up about how we need proper consent in every classroom, and not just consent and not just discussing consent in a sexual matter, but like consent for literally anything. And said in a sentence how I was also a victim.”

- Adrianna

One of the more common ways survivors seem to be engaging in political participation is through social media. Multiple women expressed that they frequently post resources for other survivors of sexual assault on their social media pages and urge others to engage with the political system, as demonstrated below with Bella and Beth.

“Now, I have an anonymous Twitter that is only #MeToo and sharing what happened to me and sharing the aftereffects and sharing my bad days... after I figured out that [the police were] never going to call me again. I was like, “No, I am taking this into my own hands.” We need to expose these men and what they do.[The tweets] started with some of the specific things that happened, like little tidbits of specific things and things he would say and the way the police reacted. Or some days I post only resources and only stories from other survivors and only links to women’s shelters and information about human trafficking and that kind of stuff.”

- Bella

“I post a lot of stuff on Instagram that is positive and affirming or makes people think. It resonates for some people pretty deeply and other people probably just look past it. But maybe [it is] not so much action oriented, like call your representatives or any of that sort of thing, it’s more so like: vote more so like let your voices be heard. Don’t let anybody silence you, especially survivors and communicate with your partners, communicate with your family and your loved ones, even if it may be difficult.”

- Beth

“I actually did [get in a Facebook argument] a few months ago. There was something that happened in the national news concerning abortion rights. And I had posted something and... someone I was like an acquaintance with, not someone I really know very well, was going at it with me in the comment section. And usually, I don’t engage on Facebook. I did a little bit at the height of Black Lives Matter as well.”

- Maddy

Beyond town halls and social media, the respondents also indicated a wide range of other behaviors stemming from their increased concern about women’s rights. From voting, to talking with friends, engaging in protests, and even volunteering at an abortion clinic – most of the respondents demonstrated a clear interest in participating in women’s rights more than they had before their assault. This increase in participation may be because of the proposed mechanisms of Political System Attribution and Survivor/Victim Identity.

2.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presents the first step in a process to understand how sexual assault becomes politicized among those who experience it. To examine the potential connections, I engaged in constructive grounded theory. Constructive grounded theory is a useful process when trying to understand concepts that are underdeveloped because it requires collecting and learning from data itself to form a theory. By using grounded theory, I was able to hear directly from survivors themselves and use their experiences to inform the project moving forward. Based on these interviews, I have proposed three elements that are important in facilitating the politicization of sexual assault among those who experience it. First, I introduced the concept of Political System Attribution. Second, the processing that can come from Attending Therapy and third, the development of a Survivor/Victim Identity. I connect these independent variables to the relevant dependent variables – Political Attitudes, Views Towards Oppressed Groups and Women’s Rights Political Participation.

CHAPTER 3

Survey Measurement and Implementation

The next phase in the project involves testing the theories derived from the grounded theory portion of the project with a survey of women sexual assault survivors. This chapter will discuss why a survey is the appropriate method to test the theories, and then will present the descriptive characteristics of the sample.

A survey is the appropriate method for testing the theories because it will allow for me to overcome some of the limitations associated with the semi-structured interviews, most notably the small N issue and the similar demographics of respondents. Even though 16 is an acceptable number of respondents for a qualitative study, it does cause problems in terms of generalizability, especially for a more quantitatively focused discipline like political science. By running a survey on a larger sample of women, I can be more confident that the findings derived from the grounded theory are indicative of a greater phenomenon and are not specific to the 16 respondents who decided to partake in a qualitative study. The demographics of the respondents may also be of concern for some. The interview respondents were mostly white, younger, middle class and highly educated women. It is possible that the theory derived in the grounded theory is only applicable to women who possess these demographics and as women diverge from this model, their experience with sexual assault could as well. While this dissertation will not focus on the reasons racial or socioeconomic differences may emerge – a large N survey will allow for me to control for these differences and could suggest future important avenues of research.

There will be some restrictions applied to the survey sample. The survey sample will be restricted to those who identify as women. While men, trans, and non-binary individuals can most certainly be sexually assaulted, the majority of victims (about 90%) of sexual assault survivors are women (*RAINN: Statistics, 2022*), making women them most relevant group to examine for this specific study. The sample will also be restricted to women aged 18-45. While women aged 18-45 are certainly not the only population of people who are sexually assaulted, it is the population of people who make the most sense to study for the proposed theory based on the scope conditions. The survey hinges on people identifying themselves as sexual assault survivors and as well as a sample of people who attend therapy. Feminist rhetoric surrounding sexual assault was not prominent before the feminist movements of the 1970's (Bevacqua, 2000), meaning that women who came of age before the 1970's probably did not have the same opportunities to learn about sexual assault and will probably not be able to report on their experiences or make political connections in the same way. Additionally, people in older generations do not attend therapy as much as people below 45, even though there are comparable amounts of mental health issues (Terlizzi and Schiller, 2022). Given these scope conditions,

people below the age of 45 are an appropriate sample for testing my theory because they will all have come of age in a post second-wave feminism time period and are more willing to engage in treatment for mental health.

3.1 Survey Instrument

This next section will develop the survey instrument to measure the independent variables (Political System Attribution, Attending Therapy, Survivor/Victim Identity) and the dependent variables (Political Attitudes, Views Towards Oppressed Groups and Women’s Rights Political Participation). The full survey instrument is in the Appendix.

Survey Measurement: Political System Attribution

To develop the survey measures for Political System Attribution I will modify measurements created by Iyengar (1996) in the book ‘Is Anyone Responsible?’ In the book, Iyengar (1996) distinguishes between causes and treatments/solutions. Understanding both causal and solution attribution is important because, according to Iyengar, both causes and treatments of political problems are themes in political campaigns and have concrete effects on political outcomes such as vote choice (Iyengar, 1996). Therefore, by asking about both cause and solutions I can disentangle upon two dimensions the ways that a person can attribute responsibility to politics, allowing for nuanced or more complex understandings to emerge. I follow Iyengar’s lead and ask respondents about both the cause of their sexual assault and suggested solutions. Specifically, I ask respondents “Which of these factors do you believe contribute to/ can help reduce the incidence of sexual assault in the United States?” and provide a list of seven attributions each – two of which represent political attributions and five to capture individual or family level attributions ¹.

If a women expresses that rape stems from rape culture, she is demonstrating an understanding that rape is a result of “myths, discourses and practices” that are used as “an effective way to reinforce relations of subordination” (Kessel, 2022). Additionally, women who indicate that punishment is too lenient will be demonstrating some sort of political understanding because they see an inherently political institution (the criminal justice system) as at least partly responsible for cause. For solution attribution, women who express that ‘Organizing against rape culture’ or ‘Creating laws and policies meant to reduce, protect, or help survivors of sexual assault’ could reduce sexual assault will be counted as possessing treatment attribution, because these answers are directly calling on political action to address the prevalence of sexual assault. Therefore, as women endorse more of these statements, attributing more responsibility to the political system, they should become more likely to change their political behavior.

¹Full question wording is in Appendix B.

Survey Measurement: Attending Therapy

Attending therapy will be measured by first providing respondents an opening explanation about what ‘therapy’ is from a Psychology Today Study (PacifiCare Behavioral Health/Psychology Today, 2004) and will then use a battery of questions from a Consumer Reports (2020) survey conducted by the National Opinion Resource Center to gauge someone’s experience with therapy. The first question asks if someone has never attended, is currently attending, has previously attended, or is thinking about starting therapy. It then branches to ask respondents who indicate that they currently attend therapy if they talk about their unwanted sexual contact². Those who indicate they attended in the past receive the same questions in the past tense to identify if they ever talked about sexual assault when they were in therapy.

Survey Measurement: Survivor/Victim Identity

To measure self-labeling, I first ask respondents “Which of the following words better describes yourself?” with the choices of Victim, Survivor, Neither or Both. Then, I use a shortened version of Boyle and Rogers (2020) measure of connection to Victim and Survivor identities to identify the strength of the identity. Boyle and Rogers (2020) ask six questions meant to measure the commitment, prominence, and salience of the identity to the person. Boyle and Rogers (2020) ask two questions for each dimension; to save space I will only ask one question from this survey that asks how strongly they agree with the statement– “If someone were to tell me I was not a real Survivor/Victim, I would be upset” to measure the salience of the identity to the person. Salience is the most relevant dimension here since I want to capture individuals who strongly identify with the identity.

The responses range from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) and are put into an index to reflect the overall strength of the identity to the person. Someone is included as a “Survivor” if they score above the mean on the “Survivor” index and a “Victim” if they score above the mean on the “Victim” index. If they answer “Both”, they are included in both measurements if they score above the mean. If someone does not score above the mean for identification for Survivor or Victim, they are included in the Neither category.

Survey Measurement: Political Attitudes Concerning Women’s Rights

To measure Political Attitudes Concerning Women’s Rights, the survey asks respondents their views on abortion, sex education, and contraception. These public policies were frequently brought up by respondents. To measure more general political attitudes, I ask about policies related to prison sentencing for a variety of crimes, including rape, and how a politician who has been accused of sexual assault should act, as the

²The wording of ‘unwanted sexual contact’ comes from the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss et al., 2007), the dominant measure in psychology for measuring sexual assault, to reflect the fact that many women will not admit to themselves that they have been raped due to the intense feelings and emotions that accompany that word and feel more comfortable and willing to answer about unwanted sexual contact.

respondents in the interviews indicated that their opinions of politicians were influenced by sexual assault allegations. I expect that women who are more liberal on the public policies to also be more likely to be more punitive towards both an accused politician and a known rapist, reflecting their greater anger and understanding of how people who engage in sexual assault should be treated, as was expressed by Shannon in the interviews. The full wording for all the attitudinal variables are in the Appendix.

Survey Measurement: Views Towards Oppressed Groups

To measure empathy towards other groups, a shortened measure of the Group Empathy index is used (Sirin, Valentino and Villalabos, 2017). Sirin, Valentino and Villalabos (2017) conceptualize empathy as a trait – meaning that members of a minority group will consistently hold this empathy towards other minority groups across time, rather than a state, which would conceptualize empathy as more of a one-time situation that is based on context. Because they are conceptualizing it as a trait, it allows for more generalization to be made. The measure specifically asks respondents “For each of the following specific groups, how concerned do you feel about the challenges they face in our society these days?” The groups they ask about are Anglos, African Americans, Arabs, Latinos, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Protestants and Undocumented Immigrants. In this project, the number of groups was smaller – asking about Women, Men, Undocumented Immigrants, Black People and White People. These groups were chosen to represent four categories: Oppressed Out-groups, Oppressed In-groups, Non-oppressed Out-groups, and Non-oppressed In-groups to provide comparisons. Asking along these dimensions will make it easier to disentangle how much of the support is general empathy (by looking across all dimensions), how much is about in-group support (by comparing the out-group supports to in-group supports) and how much is due to actual empathy extended to oppressed out-groups (by comparing oppressed out-groups support to oppressed in-groups and non-oppressed out-groups). Women will represent Oppressed In-groups, Undocumented Immigrants and Black People will represent Oppressed Out-groups, Men will represent Non-Oppressed Outgroup and White people will represent Non-Oppressed In-group. While White people is not an in group for everyone, based on the census statistics of the survey it is the group that will represent most respondents concerning race.

Survey Measurement: Political Participation

Political participation will be measured using the shortened battery of political participation variables from the 2020 ANES that asks respondents if they have participated in a wide array of activities within the past 12 months. The survey will then ask respondents if any of the activities were about women’s rights and provide an open-ended text box for them to clarify what exactly the event was. This will allow for a clearer idea of what events were specifically related to women’s bodily autonomy and freedom or sexual assault policies.

Unused Survey Questions: Sexual Assault and the Criminal Justice System

When developing the survey instrument to be used for this project, I developed a module that was focused on criminal justice views that I ended up not analyzing for the dissertation. My intent with this module was to have an ancillary chapter that examined views towards the criminal justice system given the relevance of criminal justice views in a post Black Lives Matter context. Even though attitudes towards the criminal justice system are not directly related to women's rights, it seemed relevant to collect and analyze this data to provide some insight on how direct contact with the criminal justice system may influence participation. I collected respondents' own experiences with the criminal justice system – such as if they reported the assault, how the police reacted to the assault, and if they decided to pursue a trial. I also collected their views on related concepts such as defund the police and preferences towards how police should choose what type of units to staff. Ultimately, I did not examine this data since it did not speak directly to my hypotheses about women's rights attitudes, and I felt that a more relevant ancillary chapter would be the comparison between survivors and non-survivors. However, I think that understanding how personal contact with the criminal justice system influences one's views towards criminal justice system is important and should be examined in future work.

3.2 Survey Implementation

The survey was implemented by recruiting a full sample of 2,291 American women aged 18-45. Sexual assault survivors were identified by their response to a question about experiences of sexual assault modified from the Sexual Experiences Survey, the most common survey used in psychology to identify survivors (Koss et al., 2007). To keep the number of questions asked to a minimum - someone is considered a survivor of sexual assault if they meet the definition for rape. The question stated: "Please indicate if the following has happened to you in your lifetime: Someone had oral sex with you or made you have oral sex without your consent OR Someone put their penis, fingers or objects into your vagina without your consent OR someone put their penis, fingers or objects into your butt without your consent."

Overall, the survey produced a sample of 916 women who are survivors of sexual assault. These 916 women comprised 40% of the total sample. The reported 40% sexual assault rate in my sample is higher than the current reported rate of sexual assault in the United States of 25% (*RAINN: Statistics*, 2022). Higher incidences of reported survivors could point to three circumstances. First, it may point to the strength of this research design. The Sexual Experiences Survey is long- requiring one to answer 38 questions about their experiences. When analyzing different methods of delivery for the Sexual Experiences Survey, (Koss et al., 2007) find that almost 70% of respondents drop off at some point when the survey is administered online ³, indicating that women may find it uncomfortable to answer. By shortening the number of questions about

³Koss et al. (2007) find that administering the survey face to face is the most effective method.

sexual assault and following a trauma informed design, it is possible I was able to mitigate this uncomfortable aspect and more women felt comfortable continuing with the survey (only 3% of my total sample did not answer the sexual assault question). On the other hand, higher prevalence may also reflect a bias on who was willing to take the survey in the first place. Following the trauma informed research design – respondents were informed before they took the survey that there were questions about sexual assault on it and could opt out if they did not feel comfortable. I do not know how many women opted out of taking the survey, but it is possible that women who were sexually assaulted were more willing to take the survey because they wanted their voices to be heard and feel passionate about the topic. Last, this may reflect the age group of my sample. My sample was limited to women aged 18-45 specifically because these women grew up in a time where they were socialized to understand sexual assault in a broader sense than women older than 45.

The survey was implemented from December 16th-December 22nd, 2022. It was conducted using the survey firm Bovitz. Funding was provided by Vanderbilt University and the American Political Science Association Women and Politics Section Small Grants Award.

3.3 Sample Characteristics

The sample was recruited based on US Census benchmarks for race, income, and education. These characteristics were collected because both race and socioeconomic status may affect how someone interprets their sexual assault. Race and rape interact in an intersectional way, with historical context creating circumstances where Black women, Asian women and Hispanic/Latino women face additional contextual circumstances in comparison to White women (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018). Women of color historically do not experience the same amount of legal support, face a certain type of fetishization that perpetuates rape myths of promiscuity and may deal with internal backlash from their own communities when they accuse people of rape that White women do not face (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018). These differing legal interactions, gendered expectations and community backlash could affect the formation of the main independent variables and could plausibly have effects on the dependent variables of attitudes and political participation. Additionally, some studies find that sexual assault is more prevalent among low income and low educated women, yet less resources are available to these women in comparison to higher income, higher educated women (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018). Therefore, women who occupy these lower socio-economic statuses may have experiences that are vastly different from higher socio-economic status women in terms of how they see politics as relevant to their sexual assault.

The possible effects that could stem from race and socioeconomic status are important to consider. Therefore, they are collected and controlled for in the models presented. Below, I present the distributions for these variables. My sample will be compared against the same demographics from women in the 2020 Ameri-

can National Election Study (hence referred to as the ANES) (American National Election Studies, 2021), to benchmark and understand how my sample compares to another established representative sample of the American population ⁴.

For race, respondents were asked to “check all that apply” from a predetermined list of racial categories from the census racial measurement. Following how race is coded in the Census and American Community Survey, respondents were included in a racial category if that is the sole race that they chose. If they chose more than one category, they were included in a “two or more races” category.

Compared to the ANES, my sample has a higher population of women in the Black (17% vs 12%) and Two or more races’ categories (10% vs 6%). On the other hand, Latino women are underrepresented in the sample (8% to 20%)⁵. While my full sample differs in comparison to the ANES, the racial distribution in the subset of sexual assault survivors resembles that of the full sample.

Table 3.1: Sample Characteristics: Race Distribution

	Subset of rape survivors	Full sample	ANES 2020 (women only, 18 - 45)
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	5%	4%
Black	16%	17%	12%
Hispanic/Latino	7%	8%	20%
Middle Eastern	<1%	<1%	NA
Native American	2%	1%	2%
White (non-Hispanic)	59%	56%	56%
Two or more races	13%	10%	6%

Respondents were also asked to indicate their household income. Compared to the ANES, my sample is lower income. However, it does not seem to appear that women are more likely to be sexual assault survivors based on income, as the distribution of incomes in the subset of sexual assault survivors is like that of the full sample.

⁴The ANES was used as opposed to the Census or and American Community Survey because data was not publicly available for race and gender breakdowns in the ACS. Percentages for the ANES are calculated using the post-survey sample weight.

⁵One possible reason for this disparity is that the ANES is offered in both Spanish and English, whereas my survey was only offered in English.

Table 3.2: Sample Characteristics: Income Distribution

	Subset of Sexual Assault Survivors	Full sample	ANES 2020 (women only, 18 - 45)
Under \$20,000	22%	20%	12%
\$20,000- \$34,999	23%	20%	11%
\$35,000- \$49,999	18%	17%	10%
\$50,000- \$74,999	18%	18%	16%
\$75,000- \$99,999	10%	11%	13%
\$100,000 – \$249,999	8%	11%	30%
Over \$250,000	1%	<1%	7%

My full sample is slightly undereducated when benchmarked against the 2020 ANES data on educational attainment. A higher percentage of women are concentrated in the ‘some college’ category in my sample in comparison to the ANES (41% vs 32%) and less women have completed college or post-grad degrees in comparison to the ANES. In the subset of rape survivors, this education difference persists, with higher percentages of respondents in the ‘some college’ category and lower percentages in the bachelors and post graduate categories. This is consistent with some studies that reflect the fact that women of lower socio-economic statuses may be more likely to experience sexual assault in comparison to women of higher socioeconomic statuses, though the data does not always show that low-income women are at more risk (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018; Runarsdottir, Smith and Arnarsson, 2019).

Table 3.3: Sample Characteristics: Education Distribution

	Subset of Sexual Assault Survivors	Full sample	ANES 2020 (women only, 18 - 45)
Less than high school	5%	5%	7%
High school graduate	27%	25%	24%
Some college	47%	41%	32%
Bachelor’s degree	16%	21%	24%
Post graduate degree	5%	7%	13%

Partisanship is not a census benchmark but is still an important demographic to show because there is evidence that Democrats report instances of sexual harassment more often and interpret more situations to be sexual assault in comparison to Republicans (Bankert, 2020; Craig and Cossette, 2020; Jose, Fowler and Raj, 2019). Here, we see that my sample leans Democrat, but this is consistent with the ANES. My sample is 44% Democrat compared to 53% in the ANES. There is a difference between my sample and the ANES in Republican affiliation, with my sample being 25% Republican compared to 32% in the ANES. It is possible that the subject matter of my survey made women less likely to identify as Republican and more likely to

put Independent or Democrat as they were reminded of issues of sexual violence. The implications of this deviation in partisanship from the ANES to either non-response or identify as Independent over Republican would be that those in the Independent category lean more Republican than independents typically do, or that some Republicans decided not to fill out the partisanship question.

The partisan distribution of rape survivors reflects the full sample of my survey. This is somewhat surprising given the evidence that Republicans and Democrats report sexual assault differently. However, because the question did not ask about a subjective term and asked about objective events that happened, I may have been able to overcome this typical partisan difference.

Table 3.4: Sample Characteristics: Partisan Distribution

	Subset of Sexual Assault Survivors	Full sample	ANES 2020 (women only, 18-45)
Strong Republican	10%	11%	13%
Not so strong Republican	10%	9%	10%
Lean Republican	6%	5%	9%
Independent	21%	17%	15%
Lean Democrat	9%	9%	14%
Not so strong Democrat	15%	16%	16%
Strong Democrat	20%	21%	23%
No Response	9%	13%	>1%

The biggest issue with my sample is the non-response rate for partisanship at 13% (versus less than 1% in the ANES). No questions on my survey were required given the mental burden of the survey. Partisanship was the last item to be measured, so the non-response may be due to mental fatigue at the end of the survey. A future iteration of the survey could put partisanship at the beginning of the survey to mitigate non-response, however, there is concern that reminding one of their partisanship would affect their views towards some of the dependent variables such as abortion and penalties for crimes.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion for why a survey is the appropriate method for examining the theories developed by the semi-structured interviews. By using a survey over other methods, such as more interviews, I can overcome issues of generalizability. The chapter then proceeded by discussing the survey instrument and the implementation of the survey. Finally, I presented the demographics of the sample. The next three chapters will use the survey data to test the theories derived from the semi-structured interviews

CHAPTER 4

Who's To Blame? Quantitative Analysis of Political System Attribution

The next three chapters will present the quantitative results of the three original theories developed in Chapter 2. This chapter will specifically address H1 and H2, the two hypotheses about Political System Attribution. These hypotheses state that as women place more blame for their assault on politics, their political attitudes will become more liberal, and they will participate in issues concerning women's rights more.

4.1 Political System Attribution Distribution

In the survey, four questions were asked to determine if someone held the political system responsible for either the cause or the solution to sexual assault. Two questions aimed to understand if women thought that the political system was responsible for cause and two questions aimed to understand if women think that the political system is responsible for solutions. The questions were then collapsed into a scale that ranged from 0-4, with a 0 indicating women who do not blame the political system at all for their assault, and a 4 representing someone who answered in the affirmative to all four items. The table below shows the distribution of women in each category. From this table, we can see that most women (78%) agree with three or more items in the scale, indicating an overall high level of Political System Attribution among women who are sexual assault survivors.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Political System Attribution

Political System Attribution Category	Percent in each category
0	3%
1	7%
2	13%
3	25%
4	53%

To understand internal consistency between the questions, a Cronbach's alpha test was conducted. A Cronbach's alpha test is meant to indicate how well items of a scale tap into the same concept – i.e., if the questions are all measuring different aspects of the same concept to create a reliable scale of said concept. In this case, the Cronbach's alpha will tell us if the four questions complement each other in measuring Political System Attribution of sexual assault. The alpha score is .62. This is an acceptable, but not great, measure of internal consistency. Overall, the scale is not perfect and could be improved upon, but it does seem to provide a relatively good construct of Political System Attribution moving forward and is consistent with

first attempts at scales in Political Science research (see: (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001)) and research on sexual assault in other disciplines (Ullman et al., 2006). Scholars interested in the concept of Political System Attribution can continue to develop and improve the scale.

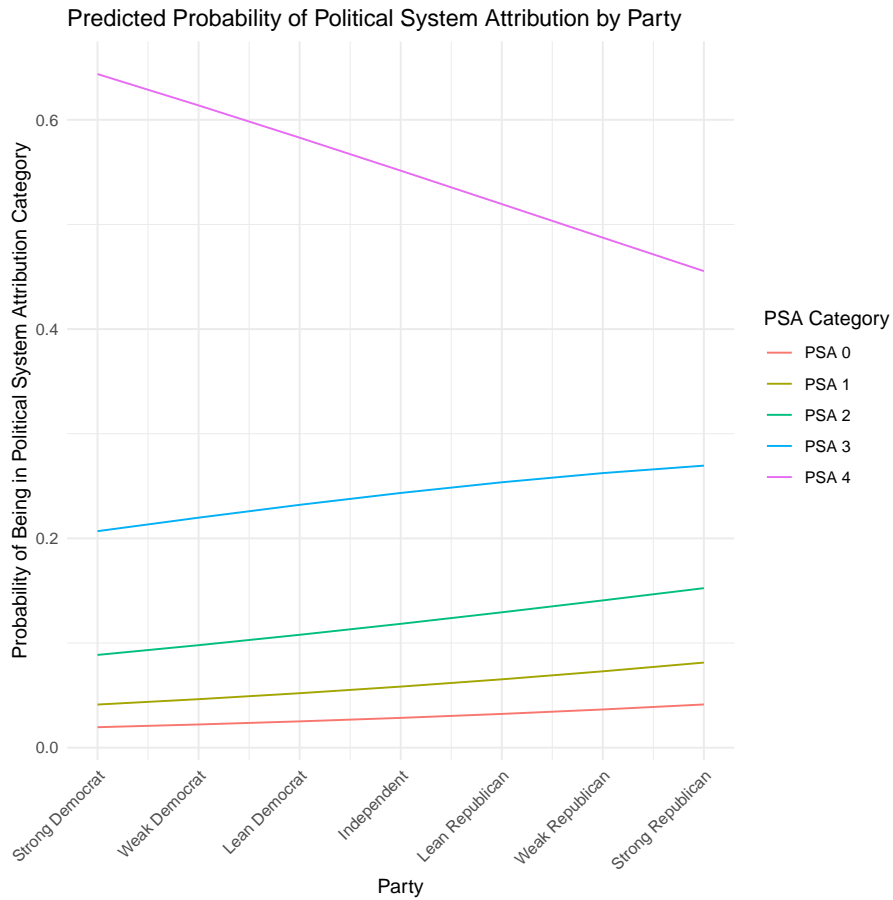
4.2 Demographics of Political System Attribution

Before presenting the main results of the chapter, it worthwhile to understand the potential factors that may be associated with Political System Attribution. In the survey, I collected race, income, education, partisanship and age because of their potential effects on both interpretation of sexual assault, and the outcomes I am measuring. I ran an ordered probit regression, due to the categorical nature of the data, to examine if any demographics seem to be correlated with Political System Attribution. In this regression, the only significant coefficient was partisanship, indicating that as someone identifies as a stronger Republican, they become more likely to have a lower score on the Political System Attribution scale. This finding is consistent with others that show partisans interpret situations surrounding sexual harassment differently (Bankert, 2020; Craig and Cossette, 2020) and suggests that it may extend to sexual assault.

To demonstrate the effect that partisanship has, and for ease of interpretation, I used ordered probit regression to predict the probability of someone being in each Political System Attribution category based on one's partisanship¹. This graph shows that women regardless of party have the highest probability of being in category 4 (the most Political System Attribution). However, there is evidence that as women move from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican their probability of being in the highest category sharply decreases. Women who are Strong Democrats have a less than .01 probability of being in category 0 and a .71 probability of being in category 4, compared to a Strong Republicans who have a probability of .04 of being in category 0 and a .45 probability of being in category 4.

¹Race, income, education and age are held constant at the most common/median category, representing a white woman who makes between 50,00–74,000, who has completed some college/vocational degree and is 34 years old. See: (Kam and Estes, 2016) for a similar method.

Figure 4.1: Political System Attribution by Political Party



Taken together, the ordered probit regression and predicted probabilities show that Political System Attribution is influenced by partisanship. This should be taken into consideration as the main results of the chapter are discussed.

So far, this chapter has introduced the demographics of the sample and the predictors of the main Independent Variable – Political System Attribution. Now, I will turn to examining the main hypotheses developed in Chapter 2.

4.3 Analysis of the Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes

The first set of tests will examine H1, which states that as women attribute more responsibility to the political system, they will become more liberal on policies related to women’s rights issues. This hypothesis was derived from respondents who indicated that after their assault, they cared more about issues like abortion and sex education that they had previously and that they thought more about sexual assault when evaluating politicians.

H1: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attribute responsibility for their assault to the political

system will be more liberal on public policies related to women's bodily autonomy and sexual assault than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not attribute any responsibility to the political system.

To measure policy preferences, respondents were asked about their views of four topics:

- Sex Education
- Abortion views
- Accused Politician: What should be done if a politician is accused (but not convicted of) sexual assault
- Rape Sentence: Their preferred punishment for rapists who are convicted

In general, there was little variation in support for sex education. Women overwhelmingly support teaching sex education to students ². Therefore, when examining the policy attitudes of respondents, I will report the results for the three policy views I measured that have more variation: abortion views, accused politician and rape sentence. All dependent variables are scaled from 0-1, with a 0 representing the more conservative opinion and a 1 representing the more liberal opinion. For the abortion variable, a 0 represents the most restrictive opinion (always illegal) and a 1 indicates the least restrictive (always legal). For the accused politician variable, a 0 indicates the least restrictive (nothing should happen) and a 1 indicates the most severe (the official should resign). Last, for the rape sentence variable, a 0 indicates the least severe (no punishment) and a 1 indicates the most severe (death sentence). Political System Attribution is also scaled from 0-1 for these analyses.

To test the effect of Political System Attribution on these variables, I used ordered probit regressions. Ordered probit regressions should be run when the data is constructed in a discrete, rather than continuous, way and there is a clear order to the outcomes. This is the case with my dependent and independent variables when examining policy positions. There is a clear order (0-4) in the independent variable of Political System Attribution, and a clear order in severity for abortion views, accused politician and rape sentencing.

One advantage to an ordered probit is that it does not assume a linear relationship between the data, which also means that it does not assume an equal distance between each category. For my data, it is possible that there is not an equal distance between each category among the policy positions. For example: there may be a smaller cognitive jump between choosing Long Term Sentence and Life Prison Sentence than when choosing between Life Prison Sentence and Death Sentence. Because of the discrete and potentially non-linear relationship in the data, an ordered probit regression is the best model to be run.

²Over 90% of women report that sex education is very important to them and support teaching about birth control methods and consent. While this is normatively good for those who are proponents of sex education in public school, in terms of data analysis it is not necessarily an interesting dependent variable to examine.

One disadvantage of ordered probit regression is that the results of are harder to interpret in comparison to the relatively straight forward results of OLS. Because probits can be hard to interpret, I will also calculate predicted probabilities based on the probit regressions that present the probability that someone will be in a certain category for the dependent variables based on their Political System Attribution category. All the models control for race, income, education, partisanship, and age by holding these categories at their median ultimately representing a white woman, who makes between \$50-\$74,000, has some college/vocational training, is a partisan Independent and is 34 years old. In the partisanship variable, partisanship is scaled from 0-1, with a 0 representing a Strong Democrat and a 1 representing a Strong Republican. Non-responders are included with Independents in the .5 category, but then also have a binary indicator. This prevents issues of collinearity that would emerge if Independents were also simply given a binary indicator.

Table 4.2: Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion Views	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Political System Attribution	0.353 (0.233)	0.899*** (0.274)	0.971*** (0.233)
Black	0.126 (0.186)	-0.401* (0.208)	0.239 (0.173)
Latino	0.326 (0.250)	-0.111 (0.281)	0.028 (0.246)
Asian	0.755 (0.534)	0.407 (0.490)	0.894** (0.438)
Native American	-0.207 (0.510)	0.648 (0.564)	0.529 (0.511)
Middle Eastern	0.267 (1.022)	-0.416 (1.357)	-0.493 (1.146)
Two+ Races	-0.017 (0.190)	-0.567** (0.223)	0.383** (0.182)
Education	0.368 (0.326)	0.632* (0.365)	-0.875*** (0.307)
Income	0.270 (0.272)	-0.227 (0.312)	-0.302 (0.260)
Partisanship	-2.147*** (0.216)	-0.203 (0.236)	0.557*** (0.200)
No Party	-0.380* (0.226)	-0.304 (0.268)	-0.553** (0.234)
Age	-0.034*** (0.009)	-0.003 (0.011)	0.0004 (0.009)
Observations	913	892	913

Note: Cutpoints not shown *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The results in the table above show that Political System Attribution has a significant effect on two of the three policy positions, Accused Politician and Rape Sentence, in the predicted direction. As someone moves from the least amount of Political System Attribution to the most, they become more punitive towards

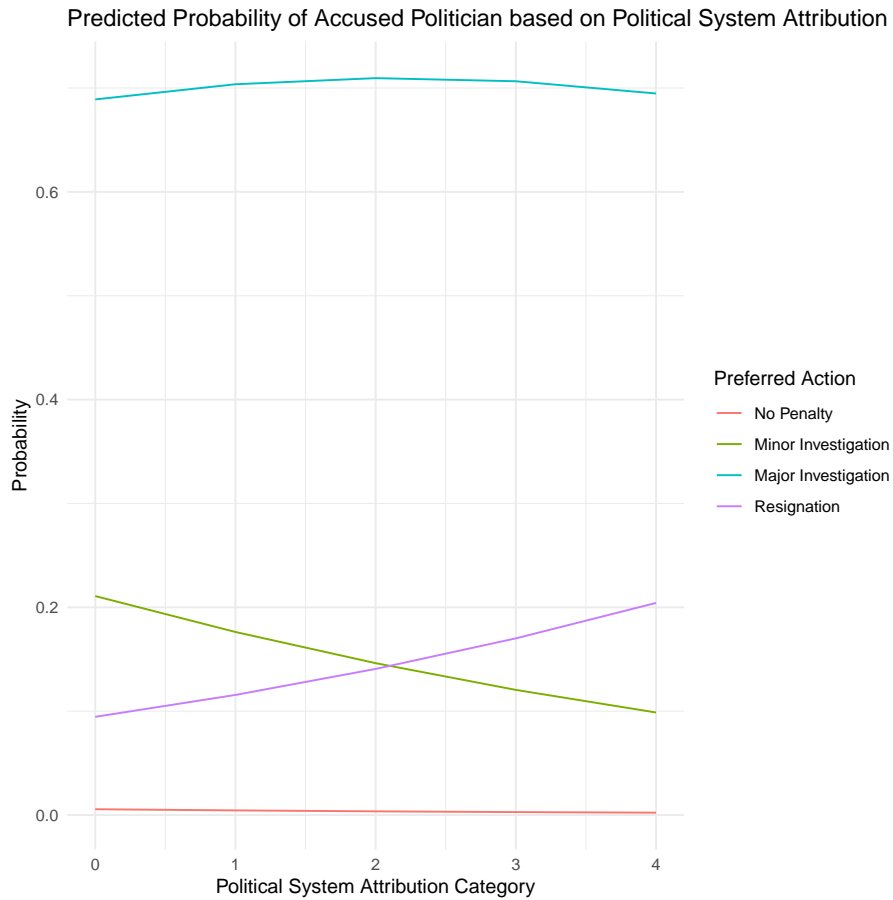
politicians accused of sexual assault and people who are convicted of rape. The only policy position that is not significant is the abortion views variable (though it does verge on significance with a .12 p-value). Given the strong partisan cues that exist around abortion, it is not remarkably surprising that there is more movement among the variables where the cues are not as strong.

Next, to further interpret the significant results, projected probabilities based on the ordered probits were calculated for Accused Politician and Rape Sentence³. The graphs that follow show the probability that someone will fall into each dependent variable category based on their Political System Attribution, with all other categories held at the most common category. By creating these projected probabilities, it is easier to see how the effects may appear among women and what this may look like substantively.

First, I examine the predicted probabilities based on the ordered probit for the Accused Politician. For this dependent variable respondents were asked what should happen to a politician who is accused, but not convicted of, sexual assault. Possible responses included no penalty, a minor investigation, a major investigation, and immediate resignation. I expect that as women have more Political System Attribution, they will move more towards the immediate resignation category. By moving towards more punishment, the respondents are indicating that they care more about the accusation and think that it disqualifies a politician from being in office. This graph shows the predicted probability that a respondent falls into each category of punishment based on their Political System Attribution category, with all other controls held at their most common category.

³The predicted probabilities were also run for the Abortion variable and are in the Appendix.

Figure 4.2: Predicted Probabilities of Accused Politician Category by Political System Attribution



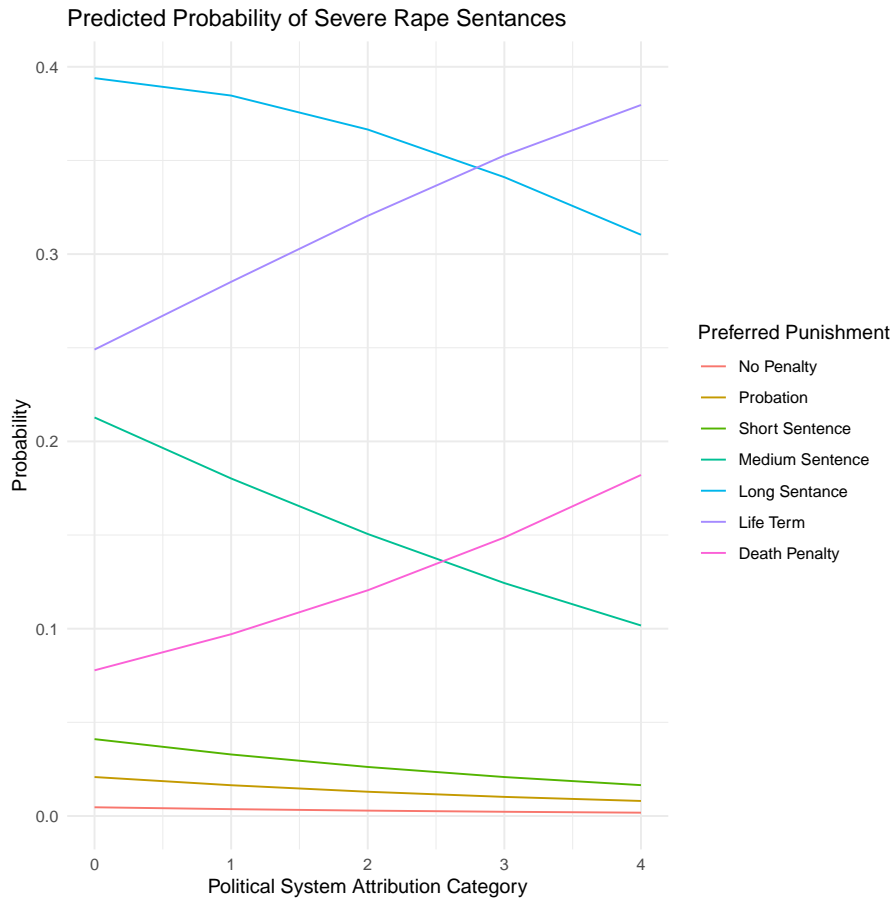
Overall, it appears as if women universally support a major investigation as the most popular punishment across Political System Attribution categories. However, we can see that those with the most Political System Attribution have a higher probability of being in the highest punishment category (the politician should resign) compared to those with the lowest amount of Political System Attribution. Someone who is in the lowest category of Political System Attribution has a .09 probability of being in the most punitive category of punishment, in comparison to someone in the highest category of Political System Attribution who has a .20 probability of being in the most punitive category.

Substantively, this should point to the idea that women who blame politics for sexual assault are more likely to hold politicians responsible for their actions concerning sexual assault than those who do not blame the political system. With the emerging number of politicians and political figures who are accused of sexual assault such as former president Donald Trump and Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, it becomes increasingly relevant to understand how women view these actions and if it hurts the public opinion or electability of those people. Here I can show there is a significant, if small, effect on the attitudes towards this type of

politician.

Next are the predicted probabilities for preferred Rape Sentences. This graph shows the predicted probabilities that someone in each Political System Attribution category will fall into each punishment category. In this graph, those who have the most Political System Attribution have a higher probability of being in the more punitive categories than those with less Political System Attribution. The lines for the two most punitive categories have a positive slope, indicating that these categories become more likely as Political System Attribution increases. On the other hand, the less punitive categories have a negative slope, indicating the likelihood of being in these categories decreases as the Political System Attribution category increases. Someone who falls in the highest Political System Attribution category has a probability of .38 of being in the second most punitive category (Life Prison Sentence (25+ years)) and a .18 probability of being in the most punitive category (Death Sentence). Someone with the least amount of Political System Attribution, who has a .25 probability of being in the second most punitive category and a .07 probability of being in the most punitive. This demonstrates that there is a substantial difference in punishment preference for those with high Political System Attribution versus those with low Political System Attribution – suggesting that personal experience likely plays more of a role for those with high Political System Attribution in comparison to those with less.

Figure 4.3: Predicted Probabilities of Preferred Rape Sentences by Political System Attribution



Substantively, it is important to consider what this increase in preferred punishment means. H1 hypothesizes that those in higher Political System Attribution categories will become more liberal in their policy positions. Typically, ‘hard on crime’ stances are connected more to conservative politics. However, this is not always the case with gendered issues, where conservatives tend to not be as punitive (Bankert, 2020). Therefore, the increased punishment while maybe not occupying a traditional more ‘liberal’ stance in the conventional way– represents an instance where someone is willing to express more punitive ideals towards rape, which is often under punished or not taken seriously. This potential preference for more punishment also highlights an important tension – that is – when someone holds the political system responsible for rape it is may be enough to create preferences that counter their other identities that make someone less punitive towards crime, such as partisanship.

What is especially interesting here is the increase in preference specifically for the death penalty (Pew Research Center, 2021). Typically, Republicans favor the death penalty more than Democrats and Independents. Here we see an instance where preferences for a very extreme position are clearly influenced by how much

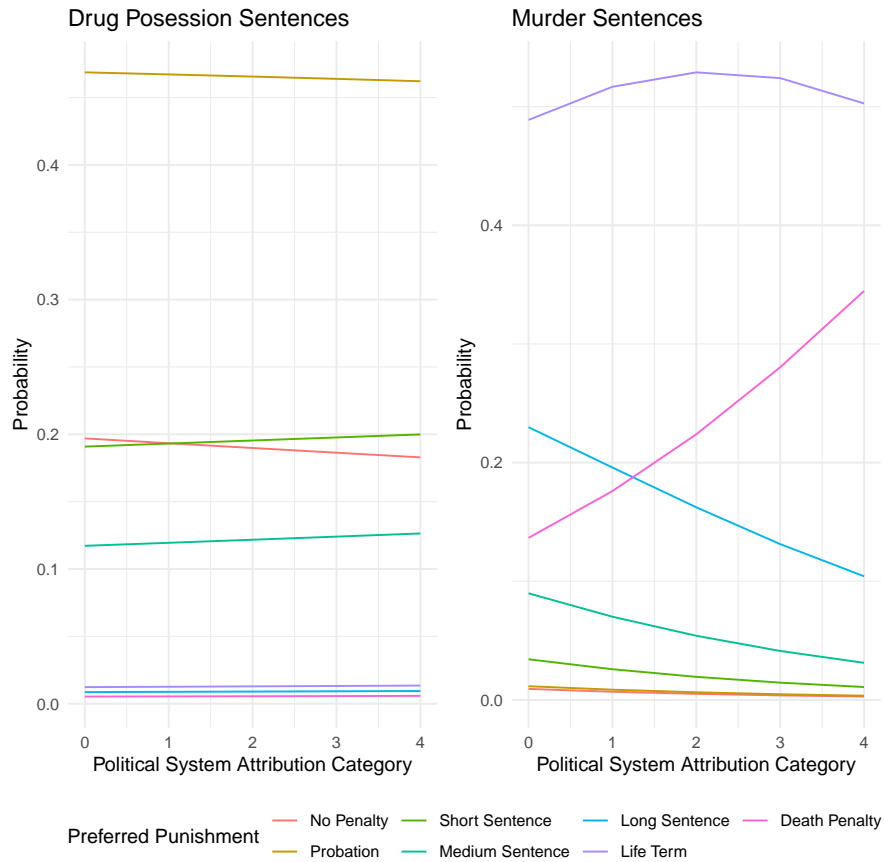
someone blames politics for sexual assault. This implies that those who attribute blame for sexual assault to the political system become more liberal by caring more about sexual assault and display a willingness to adopt an extreme position to combat it.

Next, to further demonstrate that Political System Attribution is an important predictor specifically for rape sentencing, respondents were asked the same question about their preferred punishment for someone convicted of drug possession and murder. This allows for comparisons points between crimes often considered both less and more severe than rape and will allow us to see if it appears that people with high Political System Attribution are just more punitive in general, or if there increased preferred punishment is specific to rape.

For drug possession, there is no significant relationship with Political System Attribution category and the preferred outcome. The predicted probabilities are in the graph below and are very consistent. For murder, there is a significant relationship between Political System Attribution and views on sentencing for murder. In the regression table⁴ it appears that this relationship may be as strong as the relationship between rape and sentencing as the coefficients have a somewhat similar magnitude, but a glance at the predicted probabilities graph shows something different. In the predicted probabilities, we can see that while there is a steady increase in preference for the death penalty as one moves up the scale, the preference for a life-term sentence remains stable across categories. In the rape sentence variable, there was a clear increase in both life term and death sentence as one moved across categories, indicating stronger preference for both more punitive categories. For murder, there is only preference for one of the more punitive categories.

⁴Table in Appendix.

Figure 4.4: Predicted Probabilities of Preferred Drug Possession and Murder Sentences by Political System Attribution



Together, these graphs suggest preferred punishments for rape may be predicted by Political System Attribution of sexual assault and that Political System Attribution is not simply a stand in for how punitive someone is or how much they blame politics for crime in general. While I am not able to test the mechanisms behind this connection, I suspect that there would be a heightened emotional reaction to rapists for those who blame politics that makes them more punitive and more likely to hold the person responsible for their actions. This potential emotional connection is something that did come up in the grounded theory section of my study and is worth continuing to explore in the future.

Overall, there is support for H1. Across two policies, Accused Politician and Rape Sentence, women with higher levels of Political System Attribution are more likely to occupy a more liberal stance than those with lower levels of Political System Attribution⁵. The significance of Political System Attribution reflects the idea that rape does not necessarily affect the views of women simply because it happened. Instead, when

⁵While the abortion variable is not a significant predictor, predicted probabilities still point to some differences for this variable. This analysis is in the Appendix.

women can make the connection between their own experience and politics, it is more likely to affect their political views towards policies related to women's bodily autonomy and sexual assault.

4.4 Analysis of the Effect of Political System Attribution on Women's Rights Political Participation

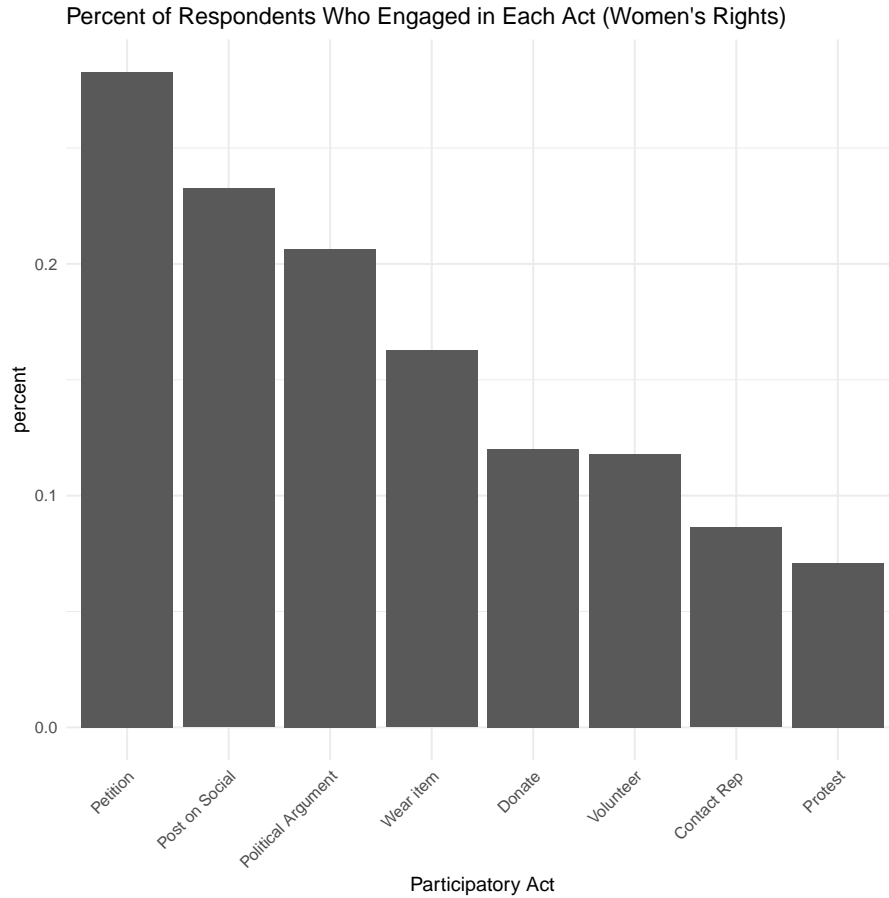
Next, I turn to the question of if Political System Attribution affects women's rights political participation. Political participation was measured by asking respondents if they had engaged in 8 activities in the past year. They were then asked to clarify which of these actions were about women's rights. The logic connecting sexual assault and political participation is like that connecting sexual assault and policy preferences. Women who have been assaulted and can connect their assault to politics will likely occupy an issue public surrounding women's bodily autonomy and sexual assault and will therefore be more engaged in politics issues concerning women's rights.

H2: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attribute responsibility for their assault to the political system will participate in politics concerning women's rights more than women who do not attribute responsibility for the assault to the to the political system.

Below is a graph that displays the percentage of women who participated in each act concerning women's rights. Signing a petition was the most popular act with 28% claiming to have signed a petition concerning women's rights in the past year. The least common act for women's rights participation is protests, with 7% of people engaging in protest concerning women's rights ⁶.

⁶Comparison to the ANES is in the Appendix.

Figure 4.5: Percentage of Women Who Participate in Each Item on the Women’s Rights Participation Scale



Now that there is a clear idea of how the individual components are distributed, I combine the eight elements into a scale that ranges from 0-8 to create a measure for Women’s Rights Participation Acts. In actual practice, the scale ranges from 0-7 because no one engaged in all eight categories. The alpha on the scale is high, .77, indicating that the items hang together and form a reliable scale.

H2 theorizes that as the amount of blame women place on the political system for their assault, their participation concerning women’s rights will increase. The table below presents the mean of the Women’s Rights Participation Scale based on their Political System Attribution category.

Table 4.3: Mean Women’s Rights Participation Scale

Political System Attribution Category	Mean Women’s Rights Participation Scale (out of 8 items)
0	.41 (.17)
1	.43 (.12)
2	.80 (.12)
3	.90 (.09)
4	1.35 (.08)

Note: Table shows means with the standard errors in parentheses

Descriptively, this table shows that women with the most Political System Attribution participate more in terms of women's rights. As women move from 0-4 on the Political System Attribution Scale, the average amount of participation goes up.

Next, I ran an ordered probit regression to test the relationship between Political System Attribution and women's rights political participation and see if these differences are meaningful with controls. The model controls for race, income education, age, and contains a separate control for Republicans, Democrats, and Independents/non-answers. Partisanship is controlled differently in the participation models because the parties may have different patterns among themselves that are better captured with indicators rather than a linear scale, or as a categorical variable. The Republican and Democrat indicators are scaled from 0-1. For Democrats, a 1/3 indicates a Democratic leaner, a 2/3 a weak Democrat, a 1 indicating a Strong Democrat and a 0 representing both the Republicans and Independents. Republicans follow the same pattern, with a 1/3 representing a Republican leaner, a 2/3 a weak Republican, a 1 a Strong Democrat and 0 representing both the Democrats and Independents. There is also a dummy variable for Independents and non-responders. In this analysis, the Independents and non-responders are grouped together to avoid collinearity. The ordered probit regression shows that Political System Attribution does have a significant effect on Women's Rights Political Participation Acts.

Table 4.4: Effect of Political System Attribution on Women’s Rights Political Participation

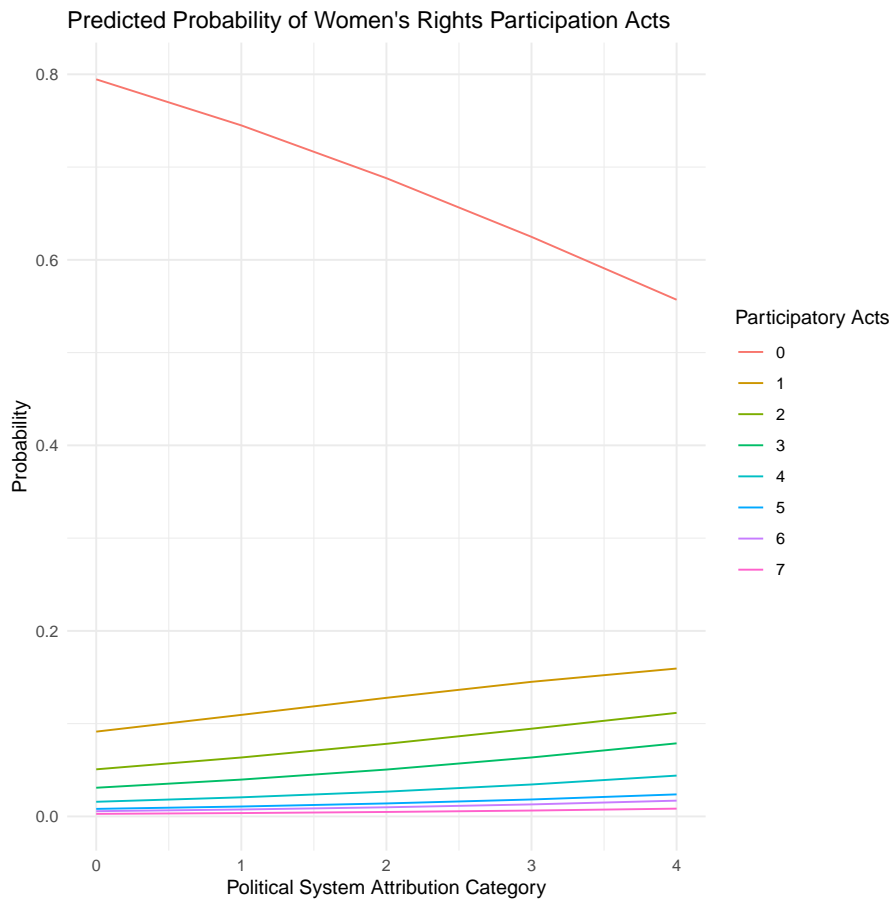
<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
Women’s Rights Participation	
PSA	1.124*** (0.285)
Black	-0.455** (0.200)
Latino	-0.400 (0.288)
Asian	-0.402 (0.471)
Native American	-1.041 (0.817)
Middle East	0.836 (1.155)
Two+ Races	0.726*** (0.200)
Education	1.405*** (0.354)
Income	0.165 (0.299)
Strength Rep	-0.504* (0.259)
Strength Dem	1.125*** (0.198)
No Party	-3.896*** (1.021)
Age	-0.052*** (0.010)
Observations	913
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
<i>Note:</i>	<i>Cutpoints not shown</i>

Next, I calculated the predicted probabilities to interpret the regression results⁷. The women’s rights participation graph shows that the participation likelihood increases as one moves from zero to four on the Political System Attribution scale. Most notably, the probability of participating in zero acts sharply declines. Those with the least amount of attribution have a .80 probability of engaging in zero acts, whereas those with the most have a .56 probability of engaging in zero acts. Substantively, this means that women with the highest amount of Political System Attribution have an almost 50% chance of having participated in women’s rights activism the past year. Given that political participation rates are historically very low due to the barriers in place (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995), having a population of people who have a strong likelihood of not just participating in politics in general, but participate in a specific way towards a specific issue, gives an indication that women are mobilized by sexual assault when they attribute its meaning to politics. Building on H1, this analysis of political participation shows that not only are there attitudinal differences due to sexual

⁷Controls are the same as in the previous predicted probabilities, except for partisanship because it is coded differently. Both the Republican Strength and Democratic Strength variables are both held at zero to continue representing an independent.

assault, but for many women this attitudinal change is reflected in political behavior.

Figure 4.6: Predicted Probability of Women’s Rights Acts by Political System Attribution Category



4.5 Qualitative Evidence

Lastly, I want to address potential concerns that may arise from partisan interpretation of the term ‘women’s rights’ in the survey. There may be concern that women’s rights is interpreted differently among Democrats and Republicans, and that Republicans claiming they engaged in actions concerning women’s rights are not necessarily moving in the liberal direction or reflecting the same type of participation as Democratic women. To examine if Republican women were interpreting the facts concerning ‘women’s rights’ the same way, I asked respondents to clarify how they participated in a qualitative way. From the responses it does appear that when Republican women participate, they understand ‘women’s rights’ in the same way as Democrats. Below are some clarifications from Republican women as to how they participated.

- Wear a Political Item - “Wore a button in support of sexual assault awareness month and the me-too movement.” Wear a Political Item- “It was for victims of domestic violence and rape”

- Political Argument - ““Someone didn’t think women deserved rights”
- Sign a Petition - “Petition about stronger sexual harassment punishment in the workplace”
- Post on social media - ”Sexual violence from political candidates”

These items are like the clarifications provided by Democrats, provided below.

- Wear a Political Item – “MeToo Movement”, “SA Victims advocacy”
- Political Argument - “people say it’s a women’s fault because of what she wears”
- Sign a Petition – “In support of sex education in schools” “Abortion rights”
- Post on social media – “In protest of repeal of Roe V Wade”, ”I have posted (publicly, not privately) about abortion rights and my own rape as well as about trans women’s murders”

While not necessarily causal, these qualitative responses indicate that Republican and Democratic women in this specific sample seem to have the same understanding of what is considered ‘women’s rights’ and are not interpreting the term ‘women’s rights’ in a conservative way (ie: pro-life or anti-transgender rights). This should create some confidence that the increase in political participation is in a more ‘liberal’ direction that reflects more autonomy and justice for women.

Overall, the regressions, probabilities, and qualitative evidence suggest that there is support for H2. The more women attribute responsibility for sexual assault to the political system, the more political participation concerning women’s rights they engage in. This further suggests that women who have been sexually assaulted and connect that assault to politics will be more engaged to actively fight for women’s rights in comparison to those who do not connect assault to politics.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter aimed to do two things. First, I introduced the concept of Political System Attribution and demonstrated that there is variation among sexual assault survivors for this concept. The variation mirrors that of the variation displayed in my semi-interviews - where the women seemed have varying levels of Political System Attribution. In the interviews, Courtney seemed to have no Political System Attribution and placed blame elsewhere, Kaitlyn very clearly had Political System Attribution and the other women fell somewhere in between. Together, the interviews and survey seem to indicate that Political System Attribution is a concept better captured in level rather than as a binary to account for the many ways that women can place this blame. Future work can work on improving the scale to capture Political System Attribution in an even more accurate way.

Second, this chapter shows that the variation in Political System Attribution among survivors has meaningful impact on political attitudes and political participation concerning women's rights and bodily autonomy. The interview respondents expressed several ways that they believed their political behavior was affected after their assault, from voting for new candidates to volunteering at abortion clinics and activism. The survey results follow the trajectory that the semi-structured interview respondents described in themselves -with attitudes and participation shifting as Political System Attribution does in a more liberal direction.

In conclusion, Political System Attribution appears to be an important factor in determining the political attitudes and participation of survivors of sexual assault. Given the current post-Roe time where issues of women's bodily autonomy concerning abortion, birth control methods and sex education are up for debate and politicians accused of sexual assault are elected to office, it is important to know who will care and who will be mobilized. Here, I provide concrete evidence that survivors of sexual assault who have Political System Attribution are mobilized in support of these issues.

CHAPTER 5

Processing the Assault: Quantitative Analysis of Attending Therapy

This chapter examines the relationship between sexual assault survivors, Attending Therapy, Political System Attribution, political attitudes, and a new dependent variable - Views Towards Oppressed Groups. I hypothesized that therapy would influence political behavior because the respondents will go through a type of personal growth that encourages reflection. Many survivors in the semi-structured interviews indicated that therapy was a healing and learning experience for them. Past literature has shown that personal growth leads to political outcomes (Blattman, 2009), however, I find null effects for all three hypotheses. These null effects indicate that in this instance Attending Therapy does not have a meaningful effect on the dependent variables. This could indicate that personal growth may need to be measured differently, or that the effects of therapy on sexual assault survivors do not extend to these political dependent variables.

In the survey respondents were questioned if they had ever attended therapy, and if so, if they ever talked about their assault during their therapy sessions. Respondents are included in the Attending Therapy variable if they talked about assault in their sessions. This is because the mechanism behind therapy, deep level thinking that may be like post-traumatic growth (Blattman, 2009), would come from thinking directly about the assault rather than simply attending any type of therapy.

Overall, 51% (N = 465) of the respondents attended any type of therapy in their lives. This rate is higher than the reported lifetime rates of individuals in the same age groups in 2018, where 37% of Gen Z and 35% of millennials reported attending any type of therapy in their lives (American Psychological Association, 2018). However, the rise of Covid-19 did make people more likely to attend therapy and reduce the stigma around therapy telehealth services for young people, so these factors could account for why my sample attended therapy more (Terlizzi and Schiller, 2022). In the end, 13% of respondents (N = 117) report talking about sexual assault in their therapy and will be included as the group that attends therapy for the purposes of this study. The results of the more specific group will be presented alongside the more general measure for a comparison point.

5.1 Demographics of Attending Therapy

Before turning to the main hypotheses, it is important to understand if it appears that certain demographics are associated with attending therapy and discussing sexual assault. To examine this, I ran a binary logistic regression (note: this is not an ordered probit since there are only two categories) where the binary variable (Attend Therapy) was the outcome variable and race, class, income, partisanship, and age were the predictors.

Somewhat surprisingly, all racial demographics were insignificant except for the Two+ races category, meaning that these characteristics do not appear to be related to this specific population's decision to attend therapy. The lack of significant racial effects is surprising because historically there have been racial differences in utilizing mental health services, however, recent trends show that the racial gap between using services is closing – especially for women under 50 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015). It is likely that because my population is younger, some of the historical differences are not as prominent. Additionally, this survey occurred after the Covid-19 outbreak. Covid-19 caused mental health problems for many people, and ultimately led to more people trying therapy and possibly reducing the stigma around it (Terlizzi and Schiller, 2022). The reduced stigma around attending therapy in the current time period may allow for communities who previously would not have gone to therapy to feel more comfortable doing so.

There also does not appear to be a partisan difference. This is also somewhat surprising, as Democrats are typically more supportive of mental health treatment than Republicans (Munsch, Barnes and Kline, 2020). The fact that Republican women seem as likely to go to therapy as Democratic women may indicate again that younger Republican women do not feel the same stigma or aversion to therapy that older Republicans may feel. This was reflected in my own semi-structured interviews. While I talked to fewer Republican women in comparison to Democratic women, the Republican and Independent women had all been to some type of therapy in their lives. It is also possible that the women who identify as Republican in this sample are not reflective of the whole population of Republican women due to their willingness to take a survey about their sexual assault.

Table 5.1: Demographics of Attending Therapy

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Attend Therapy (more specific)	Attend Therapy (General)
Black	0.034 (0.032)	0.001 (0.047)
Latino	-0.036 (0.043)	-0.144** (0.064)
Asian	0.033 (0.079)	0.021 (0.118)
Two+ Races	0.099*** (0.034)	0.079 (0.051)
Middle East	-0.137 (0.195)	-0.141 (0.290)
Native American	0.039 (0.091)	-0.137 (0.135)
Partisanship	-0.006 (0.036)	-0.038 (0.054)
No Party	-0.056 (0.039)	-0.133** (0.058)
Education	0.044 (0.056)	-0.012 (0.084)
Income	-0.028 (0.047)	-0.001 (0.071)
Age	-0.001 (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)
Constant	0.134** (0.064)	0.370*** (0.095)
Observations	913	913
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

5.2 Effect of Attending Therapy on Political System Attribution

The first hypothesis in the chapter states that those who have been to therapy will be more likely to attribute responsibility for their assault to the political system. This hypothesis came from the fact that in the interviews, women who had been to therapy and who reflected deeply on this therapy appeared to have more political system attribution than women who had not been to therapy or had not thought as deeply about the meaning.

H3: Women who have been sexually assaulted who have been to therapy will be more likely to attribute responsibility to the political system than women who have been sexually assaulted who have not been to therapy.

To test H3, an ordered probit regression was run with Attend Therapy as the independent variable and Political System Attribution as the dependent variable. The model controls for race, income, education, partisanship, and age. The regression shows that attending therapy does not have a significant effect on Political System Attribution for both the more precise and the less precise measure. Because there is no

effect, I cannot claim there is support for H3.

Table 5.2: Effect of Therapy on Political System Attribution

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	PSA1	
	(1)	(2)
Attend Therapy	0.184 (0.195)	
Attend Therapy - General		0.055 (0.128)
Black	-0.174 (0.182)	-0.168 (0.182)
Latino	-0.499** (0.238)	-0.498** (0.239)
Asian	-0.279 (0.448)	-0.285 (0.447)
Middle East	-0.718 (0.970)	-0.736 (0.971)
Native American	-0.256 (0.521)	-0.242 (0.521)
Two+ Races	-0.192 (0.193)	-0.181 (0.193)
Partisanship	-0.773*** (0.208)	-0.770*** (0.208)
No Party	-0.803*** (0.219)	-0.802*** (0.220)
Education	-0.077 (0.324)	-0.071 (0.325)
Income	-0.046 (0.277)	-0.050 (0.277)
Age	-0.007 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.009)
Observations	913	913

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Note: Cutpoints not shown

5.3 Effect of Attending Therapy of Policy Attitudes

Next, I examine the effect of attending therapy on political attitudes to test H4. This theory states that women who attend therapy should become more liberal on policy outcomes because they are better able to connect their experiences to the policy outcomes in comparison to women who may not have processed the assault as deeply.

H4: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attend therapy will have more liberal attitudes on public policies related to women's bodily autonomy than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not attend therapy.

Ordered probit regressions controlling for race, income, education, partisanship, and age were run. These regressions also control for Political System Attribution since it was found to be a significant predictor of the

policies in chapter three.

Table 5.3: Effect of Therapy on Policy Attitudes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Abortion	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence	Abortion	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
Attend Therapy	-0.024 (0.193)	0.430** (0.215)	0.059 (0.187)			
Attend Therapy -General				-0.145 (0.127)	-0.065 (0.146)	-0.110 (0.122)
Political System Attribution	0.354 (0.233)	0.905*** (0.274)	0.969*** (0.233)	0.361 (0.233)	0.900*** (0.274)	0.977*** (0.233)
Black	0.127 (0.186)	-0.418** (0.208)	0.238 (0.173)	0.127 (0.186)	-0.402* (0.208)	0.236 (0.173)
Latino	0.325 (0.251)	-0.097 (0.282)	0.031 (0.246)	0.301 (0.252)	-0.122 (0.282)	0.008 (0.247)
Asian	0.756 (0.534)	0.387 (0.492)	0.891** (0.438)	0.763 (0.535)	0.411 (0.490)	0.900** (0.439)
Native American	-0.205 (0.510)	0.644 (0.563)	0.533 (0.511)	-0.222 (0.510)	0.638 (0.564)	0.500 (0.514)
Middle East	0.263 (1.022)	-0.358 (1.361)	-0.494 (1.145)	0.261 (1.034)	-0.427 (1.349)	-0.537 (1.155)
Two+ Races	-0.016 (0.191)	-0.616*** (0.224)	0.376** (0.183)	-0.008 (0.191)	-0.562** (0.223)	0.392** (0.182)
Partisanship	-2.147*** (0.216)	-0.203 (0.236)	0.557*** (0.200)	-2.155*** (0.216)	-0.206 (0.236)	0.556*** (0.200)
No Party	-0.381* (0.226)	-0.279 (0.268)	-0.551** (0.234)	-0.395* (0.227)	-0.314 (0.269)	-0.569** (0.235)
Education	0.369 (0.326)	0.612* (0.366)	-0.879*** (0.308)	0.367 (0.326)	0.629* (0.365)	-0.876*** (0.307)
Income	0.269 (0.272)	-0.214 (0.312)	-0.300 (0.260)	0.267 (0.272)	-0.228 (0.312)	-0.301 (0.260)
Age	-0.034*** (0.009)	-0.002 (0.011)	0.0005 (0.009)	-0.034*** (0.009)	-0.002 (0.011)	0.001 (0.009)
Observations	913	892	913	913	892	913

Note:
Cutpoints not shown

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4.3 shows that attending therapy has no effect on abortion views and rape sentence views of survivors. However, it does have a significant effect in the predicted direction on the accused politician question. People who have been to therapy are more punitive towards the accused politician compared to those who have not been to therapy.

The significance of the Accused Politician variable may suggest that in some circumstances, attending therapy has a significant effect on policy opinions but that in other circumstances it does not. The accused politician question differs from the other questions in that it reflects a hypothetical situation with a potential candidate rather than a straightforward policy. The more tangible or imaginable nature of the accused politician may indicate that attending therapy has a more direct effect on things like politician preferences and candidate evaluations in contrast to other policies that do not seem to have as immediate an effect on the lives

of the individuals. While this project does not specifically examine candidate evaluations and opinions, this could be something to be examined further in future studies.

Overall, there is mixed support for H4. Attending Therapy does not have significant effects on abortion views or rape sentencing, but there is a significant effect on the accused politician. The one significant result suggests that there may be certain policies related to women's rights that are affected by therapy, but not all policy preferences related to women's rights will be affected. Future research can explore if there is something specific about the accused politician variable that allows it to be influenced by therapy, or if this one significant result is a false positive and is a feature of this specific survey and sample. It is also worth noting that even though Attending Therapy does not have significant effects, Political System Attribution remains a significant predictor.

5.4 Effect of Attending Therapy on Views Towards Oppressed Groups

H5: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attend therapy will express more empathy towards oppressed groups than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not attend therapy.

Next, I examine if attending therapy makes someone more empathetic to outgroups. Because this is the first time working with a new dependent variable, descriptive statistics about the variables will be presented before moving onto the analysis.

Respondents were asked how concerned they were about a variety of groups, including Black people and Undocumented Immigrants. The respondents could choose from five choices: not concerned at all, not very concerned, neither concerned or not concerned, somewhat concerned, and very concerned. Two minority groups were included, as opposed to one, so that almost all respondents would have at least one oppressed out-group that they were evaluating. Respondents were also asked about an oppressed in-group (Women), non-oppressed in-group¹ (White people) and non-oppressed out-group (Men), as points of comparison. This will allow for useful comparisons to see if there is something specific about the nature of the groups themselves that creates differences or if people are just compassionate/empathetic in general.

Below are the distributions of Concern for Black people and Concern for Undocumented Immigrants. For Concern for Black People, 40% of respondents are very concerned, 5% are somewhat concerned, 20% are neutral, 31% are not very concerned and 5% are not concerned at all. For Concern for Undocumented Immigrants, 33% of respondents are very concerned, 6% are somewhat concerned, 22% are neutral, 32% are not very concerned and 7% are not concerned at all.

Next, to test the relationship between Attending Therapy and Views Towards Oppressed Groups, ordered

¹There was no group that could represent all respondents as an in-group, because most respondents are White, 'White' was the best group to include as the non-oppressed in group even though it does not represent everybody.

Table 5.4: Distribution of Views Towards Oppressed Groups for Survey Respondents

Group	Very Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Neutral	Not very concerned	Not concerned at all
Black People	40%	5%	20%	31%	5%
Undocumented Immigrants	33%	6%	22%	32%	7%
Women	46%	3%	16%	32%	2%
Men	16%	17%	29%	26%	12%
White People	15%	17%	28%	25%	16%

probit regressions were run with the controls for race, education, income, and partisanship. Results for the three comparison groups of women, men and white people are also included to examine if potential positive results reflect more empathy for oppressed groups (the hypothesis) or people in general. These regressions did not control for political system attribution because views towards oppressed groups was not a dependent variable used in the political system attribution chapter – so a relationship between those variables has not been established.

Table 5.5: Effect of Therapy on View Towards Oppressed Groups

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>									
	Black People	Undoc Im	Women	White	Men	Black	Undoc Im	White	Women	Men
Attend Therapy	-0.074 (0.189)	0.032 (0.184)	-0.071 (0.189)	0.115 (0.176)	0.025 (0.176)					
Attend Therapy - General						-0.106 (0.125)	-0.026 (0.122)	-0.203* (0.120)	-0.100 (0.127)	-0.226* (0.120)
Black	1.095*** (0.196)	-0.014 (0.174)	0.704*** (0.190)	-0.351** (0.173)	0.300* (0.175)	1.091*** (0.195)	-0.013 (0.174)	-0.346** (0.173)	0.700*** (0.190)	0.296* (0.175)
Latino	0.430* (0.235)	0.396 (0.241)	0.483* (0.256)	-0.296 (0.234)	0.271 (0.228)	0.418* (0.235)	0.392 (0.242)	-0.338 (0.235)	0.472* (0.256)	0.233 (0.229)
Native American	-0.352 (0.470)	0.735 (0.461)	-0.072 (0.470)	-0.578 (0.449)	0.227 (0.454)	-0.374 (0.470)	0.732 (0.461)	-0.607 (0.447)	-0.093 (0.470)	0.185 (0.451)
Two+ Races	0.558*** (0.192)	0.019 (0.190)	0.334* (0.190)	-0.340* (0.188)	0.241 (0.183)	0.555*** (0.191)	0.024 (0.190)	-0.316* (0.186)	0.334* (0.190)	0.261 (0.182)
Middle East	0.743 (1.293)	-1.151 (1.129)	0.630 (1.271)	0.570 (0.892)	-0.022 (1.219)	0.748 (1.302)	-1.163 (1.131)	0.533 (0.890)	0.630 (1.277)	-0.089 (1.238)
Asian	0.139 (0.448)	-0.007 (0.464)	0.239 (0.475)	-0.791* (0.426)	-0.402 (0.427)	0.136 (0.448)	-0.002 (0.463)	-0.798* (0.426)	0.235 (0.475)	-0.398 (0.428)
Partisanship	-0.912*** (0.204)	-0.686*** (0.202)	-0.720*** (0.206)	-0.106 (0.193)	-0.057 (0.193)	-0.915*** (0.204)	-0.687*** (0.202)	-0.111 (0.194)	-0.722*** (0.206)	-0.066 (0.193)
No Party	-0.068 (0.211)	-0.120 (0.208)	-0.163 (0.214)	0.549*** (0.212)	0.050 (0.206)	-0.076 (0.212)	-0.123 (0.208)	0.522** (0.212)	-0.171 (0.214)	0.021 (0.206)
Education	0.520 (0.318)	0.552* (0.312)	0.097 (0.321)	0.207 (0.300)	0.007 (0.305)	0.518 (0.317)	0.554* (0.311)	0.217 (0.300)	0.093 (0.321)	0.008 (0.305)
Income	-0.294 (0.264)	-0.573** (0.263)	-0.144 (0.268)	-0.101 (0.253)	-0.493* (0.253)	-0.288 (0.264)	-0.575** (0.263)	-0.097 (0.253)	-0.143 (0.268)	-0.488* (0.254)
Age	-0.028*** (0.009)	-0.039*** (0.009)	-0.014 (0.009)	0.014 (0.009)	0.003 (0.009)	-0.027*** (0.009)	-0.039*** (0.009)	0.015* (0.009)	-0.014 (0.009)	0.005 (0.009)
Observations	913	911	913	913	913	913	911	913	913	913

Note:

Note: Cutpoints not shown

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The regressions show that attending therapy, both the more precise and less precise measure, has no significant effect on concern for oppressed groups. Because there are no significant effects on empathy for Black People or Undocumented Immigrants, I cannot say that there is support for H5.

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

Overall, this chapter shows that Attending Therapy does not influence Political System Attribution, has potentially small effects on political attitudes and has no effect on Views Towards Oppressed Groups. It is well documented that there are many psychological effects associated with sexual assault (Mason and Lodrick, 2013) and that Attending Therapy can help with these negative effects (Ullman, Peter-Hagene and Relyea, 2014). Currently, therapy has become less stigmatized and more accessible to people due to the increase in online therapy - implying that more survivors who need access to therapy can seek it out (Terlizzi and Schiller, 2022). However, while there may be more survivors going to therapy and experiencing some type of

personal growth - as was described by many of the semi-structured interview survivors - it appears that this growth may not extend to politics. Future work can examine if there are other factors of growth, such as a strong support system, that are more important for effects on political outcomes in comparison to Attending Therapy.

CHAPTER 6

One of Many: Quantitative Analysis of Self-Labeling as a Survivor/Victim

This chapter addresses the final hypotheses theorized in Chapter 2, concerning how a Survivor/Victim Identity may affect the policy preferences, views towards oppressed groups and political participation of those who have been sexually assaulted. In the semi-structured interviews, the respondents who identified as a Survivor/Victim indicated that this identity was something that influenced how they thought about and participated in politics, as indicated by Beth below:

“I think that my identity now as a survivor has opened up my ears if you will, to being a bit more woke about things surrounding sexual assault. About how politicians are ruling things either for or against the female body, or the baby carrying body.”

Beth

The hypotheses stated that those who strongly identify as a Survivor or Victim will be more liberal on the political attitudes, more supportive of Oppressed Groups and will engage in more political actions concerning women’s rights than women who do not self-identify or do not strongly identify as a Survivor or Victim.

To identify those who strongly self-identify, respondents were asked to choose the word that best describes them- ‘Survivor’, ‘Victim’, ‘Both’ or ‘Neither’ in relation to their experience. ‘Both’ was the category most respondents chose with 43% (N = 393), followed by Survivor with 27% (N = 251), Neither with 19% (N = 171), and Victim with 11% (N= 101). Respondents were then asked a question to identify how strongly they identified with the word.

6.1 Demographics of a Survivor/Victim Identity

As in the previous two chapters, I will first look at analyses that aim to understand if any demographics are correlated with any of the identities. Binary variables were created for “Survivor’, ‘Victim’ ‘Both’ and ‘Neither.’ Because the dependent variables are binary, logistic regressions were run with the identities as the outcome variable and demographics as the predictors. The regressions show that higher education significantly correlates with a respondent being more likely to identify as a Survivor, but less likely to identify as both Survivor and Victim. Racial differences are in their Neither category, where both Latino, Asian and Two+ races people are more likely to not identify with either Survivor or Victim in comparison to White respondents. The last important demographic appears to be partisanship, with Republicans more likely to identify with Neither and subsequently less likely to identify with Both.

Table 6.1: Demographics of a Survivor/Victim Identity

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Survivor	Both	Victim	Neither
Black	-0.019 (0.042)	0.066 (0.046)	-0.051* (0.029)	0.004 (0.037)
Latino	-0.061 (0.057)	0.010 (0.064)	-0.046 (0.040)	0.097* (0.050)
Asian	-0.034 (0.105)	-0.047 (0.117)	-0.085 (0.074)	0.166* (0.092)
Middle East	-0.286 (0.258)	-0.062 (0.287)	-0.127 (0.182)	0.476** (0.226)
Two+ Races	-0.0001 (0.045)	0.023 (0.050)	-0.032 (0.032)	0.009 (0.039)
Native American	0.430*** (0.120)	-0.345*** (0.133)	-0.071 (0.084)	-0.014 (0.105)
Income	-0.131** (0.063)	-0.006 (0.070)	0.053 (0.044)	0.084 (0.055)
Partisanship	0.066 (0.048)	-0.134** (0.053)	-0.012 (0.034)	0.080* (0.042)
No Party	-0.008 (0.051)	-0.068 (0.057)	0.143*** (0.036)	-0.066 (0.045)
Education	0.141* (0.074)	-0.177** (0.083)	-0.030 (0.052)	0.067 (0.065)
Age	0.006*** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.003** (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)
Constant	0.033 (0.084)	0.522*** (0.094)	0.238*** (0.060)	0.206*** (0.074)
Observations	913	913	913	913

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Next, to determine who is a strong identifier, respondents who indicated that they identified with the words ‘Survivor’, ‘Victim’ or ‘Both’ were asked to what degree they agree with the statement “If someone told me I had no right to call myself a ‘real survivor’ I would be upset (Boyle and Rogers, 2020) ¹. Among the 644 people who put ‘Survivor’ and Both (Survivor and Victim) – 5% said ‘Strongly disagree’, 6% said disagree, 28% said neither agree nor disagree, 24% said agree and 37% said strongly agree when asked about ‘Survivor’. For the 494 respondents who put either “Victim” or ‘Both’ – 5% said ‘Strongly disagree’, 5% said disagree, 24% said neither agree nor disagree, 27% said agree and 38% said strongly agree when asked about the word ‘Victim’.

For this study, a person is considered a strong identifier if they were above the average level strength of identification for either word (Survivor or Victim). For Survivor, the average is .70, meaning that someone who put either ‘agree (.75)’ or ‘strongly agree’ (1) will be considered a strong identifier. For victim, the average is .71, meaning that someone who put either ‘agree’ (.75) or ‘strongly agree’ (1) will be considered

¹ Respondents who indicated they identified with ‘Both’ were asked separately about their degree of agreement for the statement for both ‘Survivor’ and ‘Victim’

an identifier. If someone who put both fell above the average for either of the categories, they are considered a strong identifier ². Ultimately, 54% of respondents (N = 493) are considered ‘identifiers’ and 46% of respondents are considered non-identifiers or weak identifiers (N = 423). Following the lead of (Boyle and Rogers, 2020), the two groups examined are strong identifiers and non-identifiers. – with the non-identifiers and weak identifiers grouped together because the identity is more salient to the strong identifiers. While there is some slippage between terms here with some of the weak people included with the non-identifiers, comparing the strong identifiers to the other respondents allows for more variation between the respondents and captures those who have strongly internalized the identity versus those who have not.

6.2 Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Policy Attitudes

The first hypothesis in this chapter states that women who self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim will have more liberal policy views concerning women’s rights and bodily autonomy. This hypothesis reflects the fact that women in the semi-structured interviews clearly said that their identity was something that drove them to look deeper into issues related to women’s bodily autonomy.

H6: Women who have been sexually assaulted who self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim will have more liberal attitudes on policies related to women’s bodily autonomy and freedom than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim.

To test this hypothesis, ordered probit regressions were run with a binary variable for Identity as the main independent variable and the ordered categories for Abortion, Accused Politician, and Rape Sentence as the dependent variables. The models control for race, education, income, partisanship, and age. The models also build off the previous findings and control for Political System Attribution, as the results in chapter 3 indicate that Political System Attribution has a positive effect on these policy preferences.

The results in the table below show that a self-labeled identity does not appear to have a strong effect on policy positions. Once again, like the results found in the Attending Therapy chapter, the only significant result is on the Accused Politician variable. However, it is worth noting that when including Identity, Political System Attribution is still very significant. While these regressions do not lend support for H6, they do lend continuing support for how important Political System Attribution is for these policies.

²Of the 393 respondents who said ‘Both’, 56% strongly identified with both words

Table 6.2: Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Policy Attitudes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion	Accuse Politician	Rape Sentence
Identity	0.006 (0.129)	0.261* (0.149)	0.194 (0.124)
PSA	0.352 (0.235)	0.847*** (0.276)	0.923*** (0.235)
Black	0.126 (0.186)	-0.377* (0.209)	0.248 (0.173)
Latino	0.327 (0.252)	-0.053 (0.283)	0.065 (0.247)
Asian	0.756 (0.535)	0.473 (0.492)	0.939** (0.440)
Middle East	0.270 (1.025)	-0.249 (1.370)	-0.370 (1.146)
Two+ Races	-0.017 (0.190)	-0.559** (0.223)	0.385** (0.182)
Native American	-0.207 (0.510)	0.616 (0.565)	0.499 (0.508)
Income	0.270 (0.272)	-0.214 (0.312)	-0.288 (0.260)
Partisanship	-2.146*** (0.217)	-0.153 (0.237)	0.591*** (0.201)
No Party	-0.380* (0.226)	-0.323 (0.268)	-0.553** (0.234)
Education	0.368 (0.326)	0.628* (0.365)	-0.891*** (0.308)
Age	-0.034*** (0.009)	-0.001 (0.011)	0.001 (0.009)
Observations	913	892	913

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
 Note: Cutpoints not shown

It is possible the lack of strong results in support of H6 stems from the choice of policies presented. Future studies can explore if a Survivor/Victim identity has effects on policies that are more directly related to the identity, rather than women’s bodily autonomy, such as if survivors are more likely to support a candidate who claims to also be a survivor of sexual assault. Additionally, it is worth noting that when breaking out the independent variable into three variables to represent ‘Survivor only’, ‘Victim only’ and ‘Both’³, there is a significant effect of the ‘Survivor only’ variable on Abortion Views and Rape Sentence, suggesting that those who identify as a Survivor act differently than those who identify as a Victim or Both (Survivor and Victim). While examining the differences in labels is beyond the scope of this dissertation – it is consistent with some literature that shows that the label of ‘Survivor’ is particularly psychologically positive for people and could have stronger effects in the liberal direction on attitudes (Newsom and Myers-Bowman, 2017).

³Table in Appendix.

6.3 Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Views Towards Oppressed Groups

The next hypothesis, H7 states that self-labelers will express more empathy towards oppressed groups than non-self-labelers. This reflects the fact that respondents in the semi-structured interviews indicated that their understanding of their own identity led them to think more about those who have been in other types of traumatic situations.

H7: Women who have been sexually assaulted who self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim will express more empathy towards oppressed groups than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not self-label as a strong Survivor or Victim.

To test the effect of a self-labeled identity on Views Towards Oppressed Groups, ordered probit regressions were run with the binary Identity as the independent variable and the concern for the groups as the dependent variables. A 0 indicated no concern, whereas a 1 indicates “very concerned”. The regressions controlled for race, partisanship, income, education, age, and Political System Attribution.

The regressions show that possessing a Survivor/Victim identity does significantly affect for Concern for Black People and Concern for Undocumented Immigrants. Comparing this effect across groups – it appears that the identity has a stronger effect on the oppressed ingroup (women) than on the oppressed groups. However, this is not a reason for concern as it is consistent with identity theories, which states that people will prefer their in-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Additionally, there is no effect on the non-oppressed groups (Men and White people). This non-effect on the non-oppressed groups is what lends more credibility to the idea that holding an identity specifically affects views towards oppressed out-groups. Because empathy for the non-oppressed groups is not affected by the Survivor/Victim identity, there is an indication that the identity does not just create more empathy for people in general, but is connected to how one thinks about oppression.

Table 6.3: Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Views Towards Oppressed Groups

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Black	Undoc Im	Women	Men	White
Identity	0.234* (0.126)	0.248** (0.124)	0.442*** (0.128)	0.064 (0.120)	0.089 (0.121)
Black	1.110*** (0.196)	0.024 (0.175)	0.751*** (0.192)	0.308* (0.175)	-0.337* (0.173)
Latino	0.486** (0.237)	0.452* (0.243)	0.589** (0.258)	0.285 (0.230)	-0.282 (0.235)
Asian	0.183 (0.450)	0.054 (0.467)	0.323 (0.480)	-0.389 (0.428)	-0.777* (0.428)
Two+ Races	0.557*** (0.191)	0.028 (0.190)	0.341* (0.190)	0.248 (0.182)	-0.327* (0.187)
Middle East	0.897 (1.293)	-0.991 (1.129)	0.909 (1.269)	0.015 (1.220)	0.611 (0.895)
Native American	-0.382 (0.471)	0.717 (0.460)	-0.095 (0.472)	0.222 (0.454)	-0.579 (0.449)
Income	-0.278 (0.264)	-0.556** (0.263)	-0.122 (0.269)	-0.488* (0.253)	-0.096 (0.253)
Partisanship	-0.864*** (0.206)	-0.631*** (0.204)	-0.622*** (0.208)	-0.045 (0.194)	-0.088 (0.195)
No Party	-0.059 (0.211)	-0.113 (0.208)	-0.157 (0.214)	0.050 (0.206)	0.544*** (0.211)
Education	0.508 (0.318)	0.542* (0.311)	0.075 (0.323)	0.005 (0.305)	0.208 (0.300)
Age	-0.027*** (0.009)	-0.038*** (0.009)	-0.012 (0.009)	0.004 (0.009)	0.014 (0.009)
Observations	913	911	913	913	913

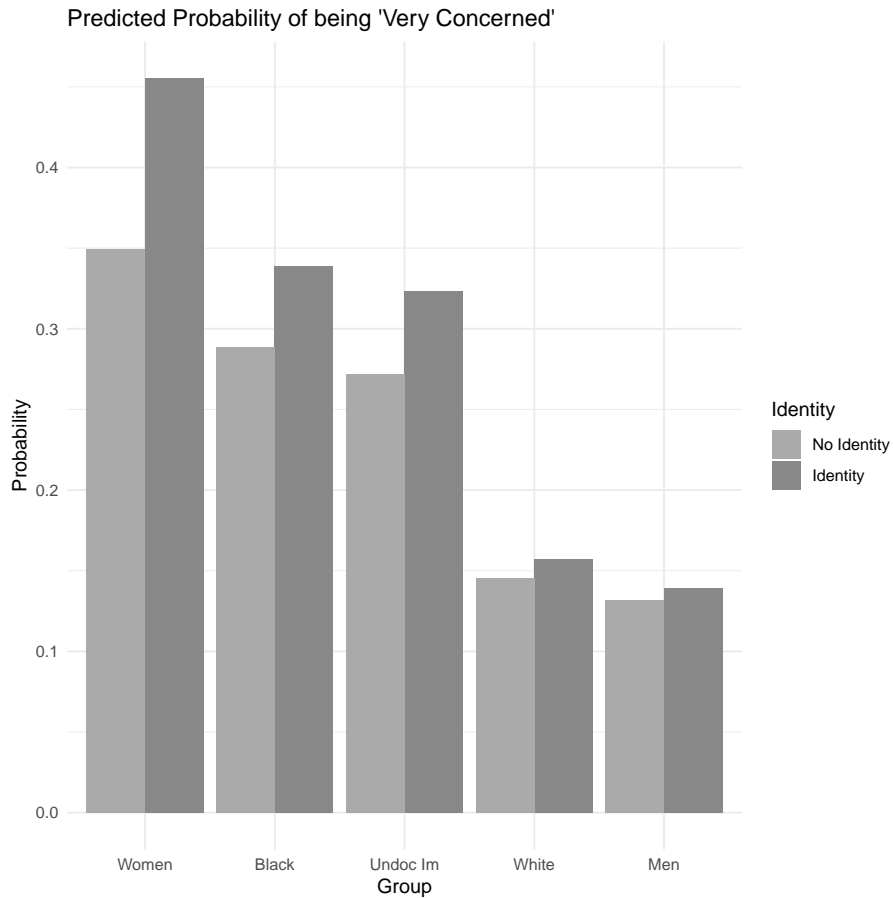
Note:

Note: Cutpoints not shown

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Next, to visualize the ordered probit results, the projected probabilities of someone being in the “Very concerned” category for each group are presented. These probabilities represent someone who is white, has an income between \$50,000-\$74,999, has attended some college, is a partisan independent and is 34 years old.

Figure 6.1: Predicted Probability of Being 'Very Concerned' for Groups Based on Survivor/Victim Identity



This chart shows that there are clear differences between Identifiers and Non-identifiers concerning support for oppressed groups. Identifiers have a .34 probability of being very concerned for Black people, whereas non-identifiers have a .29 probability. For Undocumented Immigrants, Identifiers have a .32 probability of being very concerned and non-identifiers have a .27 probability. For Women, Identifiers have a .46 probability of being very concerned and non-identifiers have a .35 probability. In contrast, the numbers are relatively similar for White people and Men. Identifiers have a .16 probability of being very concerned for White people and non-identifiers have a .15 probability, whereas identifiers have a .14 probability and non-identifiers have a .15 probability of being very concerned for Men.

This section supports H7. There is evidence that those who self-identify as a Survivor or Victim are significantly more concerned for oppressed groups, including oppressed out-groups, than those who do not identify as a Survivor or Victim. The positive results suggest that there is some psychological mechanism that comes from gaining the social identity of a survivor or victim that influences their political attitudes towards oppression. Additionally, analysis of the groups by binary indicators for Survivor, Victim and Both do not

have significant results⁴. These insignificant results suggest that at least for this outcome, the individual word is not what does the work - but instead it is the psychological mechanism behind self-labeling. The idea that holding a social identity around trauma can affect political outcomes is consistent with work on political participation and trauma that shows social identities can influence the participation of trauma victims (Marsh, 2022). The next section will build off this by specifically looking at the political participation of identifiers.

6.4 Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Political Participation

The last hypothesis states that women who strongly identify as a Survivor or Victim will participate in politics related to women's rights more than women who do not strongly identify as either. To test this hypothesis, ordered probit regressions were run with Identity as the independent variable and the women's rights participation scale as the dependent variable. The model controls for race, education, income, partisanship, age, and Political System Attribution. For ease of interpretation Political System Attribution is scaled from 0 -1. The model shows that a Survivor/Victim identity has a significant positive impact on participation in women's rights, even when controlling for Political System Attribution.

⁴Table in Appendix.

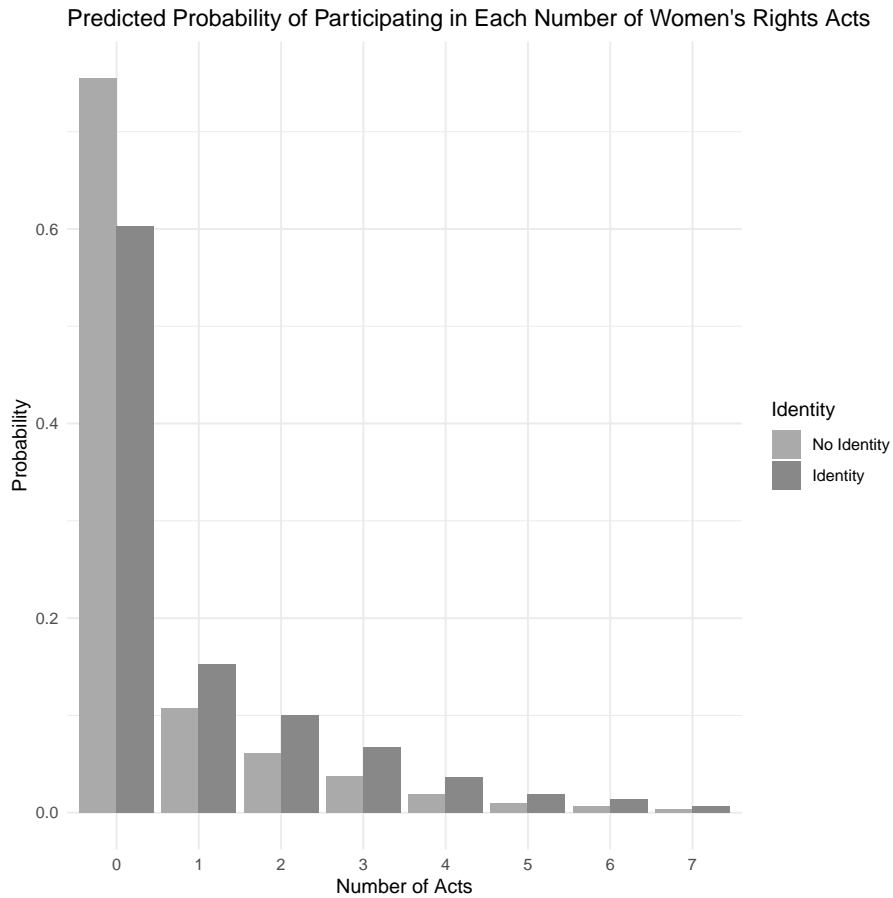
Table 6.4: Effect of a Survivor/Victim Identity on Women’s Rights Political Participation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Women’s Rights Participation
Identity	0.707*** (0.146)
PSA	1.015*** (0.290)
Black	−0.413** (0.203)
Latino	−0.235 (0.291)
Asian	−0.256 (0.469)
Native American	−1.166 (0.826)
Middle East	1.332 (1.158)
Two+ Races	0.761*** (0.201)
Education	1.493*** (0.356)
Income	0.233 (0.301)
Strength Rep	−0.532** (0.261)
Strength Dem	1.019*** (0.200)
No Party	−4.025*** (1.026)
Age	−0.049*** (0.010)
Observations	913
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	
<i>Note: Cutpoints not shown</i>	

Next, to visually present these results, the predicted probability that Identifiers will participate in each number of acts are presented ⁵. From this chart, we can see that non-identifiers have a higher probability of participating in zero acts compared to identifiers (.75 vs .60) and that identifiers have a higher probability of being in the 1-7 acts categories than non-identifiers. In a separate analysis that condenses the categories down to a binary indicator for the likelihood that someone will participate in one or more acts, Identifiers have a .42 likelihood of participating and Non-identifiers have a .28 likelihood of participating.

⁵Model represents a white, middle income, middle education, independent, 34 year old woman with Political System Attribution held in the middle representing someone in category “2”.

Figure 6.2: Predicted Probability of Participating in Women’s Rights Acts by Survivor/Victim Identity



The evidence presented above supports H8: women who strongly identify as a Survivor or Victim participate in politics concerning women’s rights more than women who do not identify as a Survivor or Victim. The findings that identities positively influence political participation concerning women’s rights hold even when running the model with binary indicators for each identity - as all identities significantly impact political participation⁶. Overall, these findings are consistent with political science literature that has shown victimization is connected to increased political participation (Bateson, 2012) and that social identities can increase political participation in traumatic situations (Marsh, 2022). While there may not have been significant effects for policy views, the increase in participation does suggest that women who identify as a survivor or victim of sexual assault join the issue public concerning women’s rights and are more likely to act concerning women’s rights.

⁶Table in Appendix.

6.5 Chapter Conclusion

Overall, this chapter shows that a Survivor/Victim identity has a positive effect on Views Towards Oppressed Groups and political participation concerning women's rights. Substantively, this means that when someone internalizes this new social identity, it can act as something that spurs the individual to care more about others and engage in political acts that reflect this (Huddy, 2013).

The importance of a Survivor/Victim identity for sexual assault survivors has wider implications for how survivors of traumatic events in general may be engaging with politics. In her interview, Kaitlyn said that identifying as a Victim allows her to feel as if she is 'one of many' people who are caught up in systems of oppression. It is possible that this feeling is not contained to those who have been sexually assaulted but extends to Survivor/Victims of many experiences. This may mean that Survivor/Victims of other types of traumas are also more supportive of sexual assault survivors and suggests possible avenues for coalitions between groups of people. Next steps would be to explore if this finding holds for other types of trauma survivors, as well as to see if this support extends beyond the theoretical and into actionable dependent variables like political participation.

CHAPTER 7

Beyond the Survivor Sample: Examining Those Who Have Personally Experienced Sexual Assault in Comparison to Those With Proximate Contact and No Contact

This chapter will present results from exploratory analyses that compare those who have personally experienced sexual assault (called **Personal Experience** in this chapter) to two groups: those who have not been personally assaulted but report having a close family member or friend who has (called **Proximate Contact**) and those who have not personally been assaulted and who do not report having a close family member or friend who has been sexually assaulted (called **No Contact**). By comparing those who have personally been sexually assaulted to these groups, a general understanding of the following can begin to emerge.

1. Are those who have personally experienced sexual assault differentiable from people who have not experienced sexual assault?
2. Are those who have personally experienced sexual assault differentiable from people who have proximate, but not personal, contact with sexual assault?

The bulk of this dissertation has focused on variation among those who have personally experienced sexual assault. This is because I have been exploring within group variation to understand why some people seem to change their attitudes or take more action after their assault than others. However, it is important to consider that sexual assault itself may create some variation among those who personally experience it and those who don't, as there is reason to believe that those who have personally been assaulted may behave differently from those who have no experience with sexual assault. Individuals who have not been assaulted may be less likely to join the issue publicly that women who are sexually assaulted may become more likely to join because issues related to sexual assault do not have the same salience (Krosnick, 1990). Because women who have not been sexually assaulted have not faced such a traumatic, gendered event, women's issues are less likely to become salient to them in comparison to those who have personally experienced sexual assault. This leads to the idea that those with No Contact will have less Political System Attribution and will be less liberal on policy attitudes, views towards oppressed groups and will participate in politics concerning women's rights less than those who have been sexually assaulted.

Another group to consider is the subset of the population who have not personally been sexually assaulted but have a loved one who has. People who have not personally been assaulted but have a close family member or friend who has may act similarly, or become even more mobilized or liberal, than those who have personally been assaulted. The carceral state literature has shown that when a family member is sent to

prison or jail, the family and friends of those individuals become more mobilized to act against the carceral system than the individuals themselves (Anoll and Israel-Trummel, 2019; Walker, 2014). This increased participation by family members and friends in comparison to those who are personally affected stems from the mental burden that accompanies being in the legal system. Those who personally experienced prison, jail and the legal system must grapple with the negative effects of the experience that their friends and family do not feel. A similar process could emerge for those who have been assaulted. Some people who have been assaulted will face more mental burden than others. It is reasonable to assume that those facing extreme mental burden may not be as mobilized or as likely to join the issue public surrounding women’s rights as those who are not experiencing the same burdens. Those who have Proximate Contact may not have the same mental burden but may still experience the emotions and raised awareness that are enough to make them care about issues related to sexual assault and join the issue public (Krosnick, 1990). The decreased mental burden may spur women who have Proximate Contact to join the same issue publics surrounding women’s rights as women who have been personally assaulted to fight for those that they love. Here, I expect that those with proximate contact will be similar, if not more liberal, than those with personal experience on Political System Attribution, policy attitudes, views towards oppressed groups and women’s rights political participation.

To examine potential similarities and differences between the groups, respondents were assigned to one of three mutually exclusive categories. Respondents who indicated they have been personally sexually assaulted are included in the Personal Experience category. Of the remaining respondents, those who indicated they have a close friend or family member who has been assaulted are assigned to the Proximate Contact category, and those who report no Personal Experience and no knowledge of friends or family members who have been sexually assaulted are assigned to the No Contact category. Below is the distribution of respondents. The Personal Experience category is the most common – with 40% of women, followed by No Contact at 33% then Proximate Contact at 27%.

Table 7.1: Distribution of Personal Experience, Proximate Experience and No Contact Among the Full Sample

Category	N/Percentage
Personal Experience	916 (40%)
Proximate Contact	615 (27%)
No Contact	760 (33%)

The chapter will proceed by first presenting an exploratory analysis that examines if demographics are associated with if someone is in the Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Contact category. This is followed by an analysis of Political System Attribution that will examine if those in the Personal Experience, Proximate Contact and No Contact categories have significantly different levels of Political System Attribution.

tion. This is followed by tests that aim to examine if the connection between Political System Attribution and outcome variables is moderated by whether someone is in the Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No contact group. These moderation analyses follow the work of Burns, Schlozman and Verba (2001) to examine not just if the difference in level of an independent variable between groups (such as Political System Attribution) matters for affecting dependent variable, but if the group itself affects the relationship between the independent variable and the outcomes variable. For example, in Burns, Schlozman and Verba (2001), the authors explain that the gender gap in political participation is due to not just differences in the level of factors (such as education) between men and women – but also the different effect of these factors like on men and women. Here, the same concept follows. For my analysis difference of level of factors like Political System Attribution may matter – but difference in the effect among groups may also explain differences in outcomes. I will explore this by running moderation analyses that interact the independent variable and group one is in. A positive interaction term indicates that for the dependent variable, the relationship between the dependent variable and Political System Attribution changes based on the group someone is in. If the interaction term is not significant, it indicates that the Political System Attribution maps onto the dependent variable the same across groups. These analyses are then replicated for Attending Therapy. Survivor/Victim identity is not examined in this chapter because it was only asked to those with Personal Experience in the survey.

7.1 Demographics of Personal Experience, Proximate Contact and No Contact

Before examining the differences in the main variables from the dissertation, it is useful to understand if there are any demographics that are correlated with whether someone is in the Personal Experience, Proximate, or No Contact category. By examining these potential differences, we can understand if it appears that there is a connection between demographics that make someone more likely to say they have been assaulted, or know someone who has been, that could be examined further in the future. For example, this allows some interpretation on if there appears to be partisan differences. If there appears to be a difference among partisans, it could suggest that partisan affiliation plays a role in how someone interprets assault or talks about it with those that they love, in the same way that there are partisan differences in interpretation of sexual harassment (Craig and Cossette, 2020; Bankert, 2020). Though the definitions of assault are probably more rigid and recognizable than harassment, talking about it may be more taboo in conservative circles than liberal circles. The hesitancy around talking about assault may lead to less Republicans knowing that their loved ones have been assaulted – creating potential differences in how partisans act. To examine these potential demographic differences, I ran a multinomial regression with the unordered categories of Personal, Proximate and No Contact as the outcome variables. The results present the Proximate and No Contact categories – thus indicating if demographics are associated more with these categories in comparison to the

Personal Experience category.

Table 7.2: Demographics of Personal Experience, Proximate Experience and No Contact Among the Full Sample

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Proximate Contact	No Contact
Black	0.160 (0.146)	0.172 (0.143)
Latino	0.199 (0.195)	0.228 (0.188)
Asian	0.533* (0.316)	1.329*** (0.276)
Two+ Races	-0.194 (0.171)	-0.445** (0.176)
Middle East	-0.048 (0.920)	-0.022 (0.922)
Native American	-1.095* (0.644)	-0.441 (0.475)
Income	0.411* (0.216)	0.639*** (0.208)
Education	0.318 (0.254)	0.555** (0.246)
Partisanship	-0.309* (0.170)	0.057 (0.163)
No Party	0.271 (0.179)	0.753*** (0.160)
Age	-0.022*** (0.007)	-0.001 (0.007)
Constant	0.117 (0.281)	-0.866*** (0.279)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,826.825	4,826.825
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

There are few demographic differences that stand out. First, partisanship is a significant indicator for the Proximate category, but not the No Contact Category – with Republicans less likely to claim they have a loved one who has personal contact. This may be consistent with literature that indicates Republicans have stricter definitions for what counts as harassment (Bankert, 2020). Republican women may consider less of their friends to be survivors of assault, or may even talk about assault less, than Democratic women – leading them to be less likely to claim they have friends and family with personal contact. On the other hand, it is slightly surprising that Republicans are not more likely to say they have No Contact. However, it is also possible that Republican women have less doubt when it comes to the more severe instances like sexual assault. It is also possible that Republicans in the Personal Experience sample may be different from Republican women in general. One possibility is that over time, Personal Experience can move the partisanship of respondents in a more liberal direction and that the women in my sample have already begun moving in the Democratic direction. For example, Michelle, the respondent who was raised conservatively but now considers herself

an Independent may have moved left after processing her experience. Since I do not have a panel study that covers many time periods, I cannot examine if this is true. However, researchers with the time and ability should examine if the partisanship of women who have been personally assaulted or have a loved who has been assaulted shifts in the Democratic direction over time.

Income and Education also appear to be a factor. Higher education and income individuals are less likely to report Personal Experience in comparison to those with lower levels of income and education, and more likely to be in the Proximate or No Contact categories. This is somewhat surprising, given that those with higher education are more likely to understand what sexual assault is and the literature seems to be mixed on if women who have lower socio-economic status are at increased risk of sexual assault. However, there is some evidence that women with lower socioeconomic statuses are at an increased risk which is consistent with these findings (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson, 2018).

In terms of race, those who are Two+ races are more likely to have Personal Experience in comparison to White respondents. Asian respondents also have significant results, but low a N for Asian respondents makes me hesitant to make any real claims currently.

Overall, it does appear that some demographics are correlated with the category someone falls into. Partisanship seems to be the most important of these variables, with Republican women less likely to report Proximate Contact. My instinct for the why this partisan gap emerges is not that Democratic women are more likely to be assaulted or to know someone who has been assaulted, but that Democratic women feel less shame in acknowledging assault, understand more things to include sexual assault, and are more open to talking about assault than Republican women due to historical narratives that the parties have had around assault (Bevacqua, 2000). Future work can continue to identify these differences further and the potential impacts they may have.

Now that I have examined the demographics associated with those in the Personal Experience, Proximate Contact and No Contact categories, I will examine the variables used in this dissertation for each group. First, I will look at initial differences between groups with means and t-tests, and then the appropriate regression will be run to account for controls. I will then examine the appropriate outcome variables for moderation effects by group.

7.2 Effects of Political System Attribution Among the Groups

The first variable I will examine for differences is Political System Attribution. Political System Attribution was a key variable in the dissertation for examining the outcomes of political attitudes and participation. Therefore, it is possible that Political System Attribution affects not just the behavior of survivors, but also those who develop Political System Attribution without personally experiencing assault themselves. In this

section, I will explore if there are differences in Political System Attribution between the groups. If there are no differences between groups in terms of Political System Attribution, this may indicate that Political System Attribution is an important concept for women, but it does not vary depending on one's own experiences. However, if there are differences between groups, it reinforces the idea that Political System Attribution may contribute to differences in political outcomes and develops based on one's personal experiences.

Presented below are the means for each item in the Political System Attribution scale and the total scale for the three groups, as well as the standard errors in parentheses and p values for the t-tests between each pair. The first set of tests examine if there are distinguishable differences between those with Personal Experience and No Contact. Here, there is a very clear distinction between the groups. There is a significant difference between every item on the scale and the full scale itself for those with Personal Experience and No Contact, with Personal Experience consistently more liberal than those with No Contact. On the other hand, there are no significant differences between those with Personal Experience and Proximate Contact. The significance between Personal Experience-No Contact, but not between Personal Experience -Proximate Contact, suggests that those with some sort of contact with sexual assault – either personal or proximate through a loved one – are distinct from people with No Contact.

Table 7.3: Political System Attribution Scale by Personal, Proximate and No Contact

	Personal Experience	No Contact	Proximate Contact	T-tests
Rape Culture Responsible	.72 (.01)	.61 (.02)	.76 (.02)	Pers- No: p <.001*** Prox - No: p <.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .08
Policies Responsible	.76 (.01)	.64 (.02)	.75 (.02)	Pers- No: p <.001*** Prox - No: p <.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .66
Legal Solutions	.85 (.01)	.75 (.02)	.87 (.01)	Pers- No: p <.001*** Prox - No: p <.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .33
Organizing Solutions	.81 (.01)	.69 (.02)	.81 (.02)	Pers- No: p <.001*** Prox - No: p <.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .90
Scale (scaled 0-1)	.79 (.01)	.67 (.01)	.80 (.01)	Pers- No: p <.001*** Prox - No: p <.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .38
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

Next, to further examine the differences in Political System Attribution, an ordered probit regression was run with the Political System Attribution scale as the outcome and dummies for Proximate Contact and No Contact groups included as independent variables, with the Personal Experience group as the suppressed variable so we can observe if each group is distinct from Personal Experience. Here, we see that even when

controlling for demographics, No Contact remains distinct from those with Personal Experience and has a negative effect on Political System Attribution. On the other hand, Proximate Contact remains indistinguishable from Personal Experience.

Table 7.4: Effect of Proximate and No Contact Categories on Political System Attribution

<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
Political System Attribution	
No Contact	-0.482*** (0.096)
Proximate Contact	0.012 (0.101)
Black	-0.164 (0.114)
Latino	0.072 (0.148)
Asian	0.032 (0.201)
Two+ Races	-0.037 (0.134)
Middle East	-0.535 (0.680)
Native American	-0.344 (0.376)
Income	0.160 (0.166)
Education	0.573*** (0.196)
Partisanship	-0.803*** (0.130)
No Party	-1.294*** (0.130)
Age	-0.005 (0.006)
Observations	2,255

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Note: Cutpoints not shown

The tests presented here confirm that there is a difference in Political System Attribution between those who have Personal Experience with sexual assault and those who have No Contact with sexual assault. On the other hand, it shows that there is no distinction between those who have Personal Experience and Proximate Contact on Political System Attribution.

7.2.1 Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes for Personal, Proximate and No Contact

Next, I can examine if the different levels of Political System Attribution appear to influence political outcomes for the groups. To do this, I will first examine the political attitude variables from the dissertation

– Abortion Views, Accused Politician and Rape Sentence. These variables were all theorized as possibly influenced by Political System Attribution due to their relevance to women’s rights.

Before the analysis that looks at the effect of Political System Attribution on the attitudinal variables, I present the descriptive means for each variable by group. This will allow for a general understanding of baseline attitudinal differences. While most of the t-tests between the groups are insignificant – one significant difference does stand out: Personal and Proximate Contact groups are significantly more liberal than those with No Contact on Abortion. On a scale of 0-1, Personal Experience and Proximate Contact have a score that is .13 points higher. An ordered probit regression for each variable with the demographic controls and an indicator for the Proximate and No Contact groups confirms that these differences hold, with those with Personal Experience and Proximate Contact remaining significantly more liberal on Abortion¹. No Contact also becomes borderline significant in the positive (more punitive) direction for the Rape Sentence variable.

Table 7.5: Mean of Policy Attitudes for Personal, Proximate and No Contact

	Personal Experience	Proximate Contact	No Contact	T-tests
Abortion	.69 (.01)	.71 (.01)	.62 (.01)	Pers- No: p <.001*** Prox- No: p <.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .16
Accused Politician	.67 (.01)	.66 (.01)	.67 (.002)	Pers- No: p = .90 Prox- No: .46 Pers - Prox: p = .38
Rape Sentence	.75 (.01)	.76 (.01)	.76 (.01)	Pers- No: p = .28 Prox- No: p = .97 Pers - Prox: p = .97
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

To further examine the effect of Political System Attribution for the whole sample on the dependent variables, an ordered probit regression for each dependent variable was run with Political System Attribution as the main indicator and indicators for Proximate and No Contact. The table below shows that Political System Attribution has a positive effect on all three variables – meaning that the level of Political System Attribution influences the outcomes.

Next, to understand if there is a moderation effect by group, I ran a moderation analysis for each of the main attitudinal variables- Abortion, Accused Politician and Rape Sentence – by interacting the scaled Political System Attribution variable with the No Contact and Proximate Contact variables ².

The results from the moderation analysis reveal that moderation effects do exist, but not for every variable. There are no significant interaction terms for the Abortion and Accused Politician variables, implying

¹Table in Appendix.

²Table in Appendix.

Table 7.6: Effect of Political System Attribution on Policy Attitudes With Group Indicators

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion Views	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
Political System Attribution	0.408*** (0.142)	0.860*** (0.173)	0.519*** (0.143)
No Contact	-0.421*** (0.097)	0.029 (0.111)	0.203** (0.095)
Proximate Contact	-0.028 (0.100)	-0.134 (0.111)	0.148 (0.096)
Black	-0.079 (0.114)	0.032 (0.128)	0.102 (0.110)
Latino	-0.047 (0.147)	-0.076 (0.169)	0.385*** (0.148)
Asian	-0.170 (0.195)	-0.037 (0.220)	0.573*** (0.197)
Two+ Races	-0.059 (0.131)	-0.221 (0.153)	0.180 (0.128)
Middle East	0.460 (0.755)	0.360 (0.859)	0.169 (0.691)
Native American	0.022 (0.390)	0.055 (0.477)	0.663 (0.404)
Income	0.175 (0.164)	-0.163 (0.187)	-0.253 (0.160)
Education	0.736*** (0.196)	0.177 (0.221)	-0.670*** (0.188)
Partisanship	-2.235*** (0.135)	-0.231 (0.146)	0.485*** (0.127)
No Party	0.141 (0.135)	-0.424** (0.167)	-0.501*** (0.142)
Age	-0.032*** (0.006)	0.007 (0.006)	-0.0003 (0.005)
Observations	2,254	2,125	2,224

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Note: Cutpoints not shown

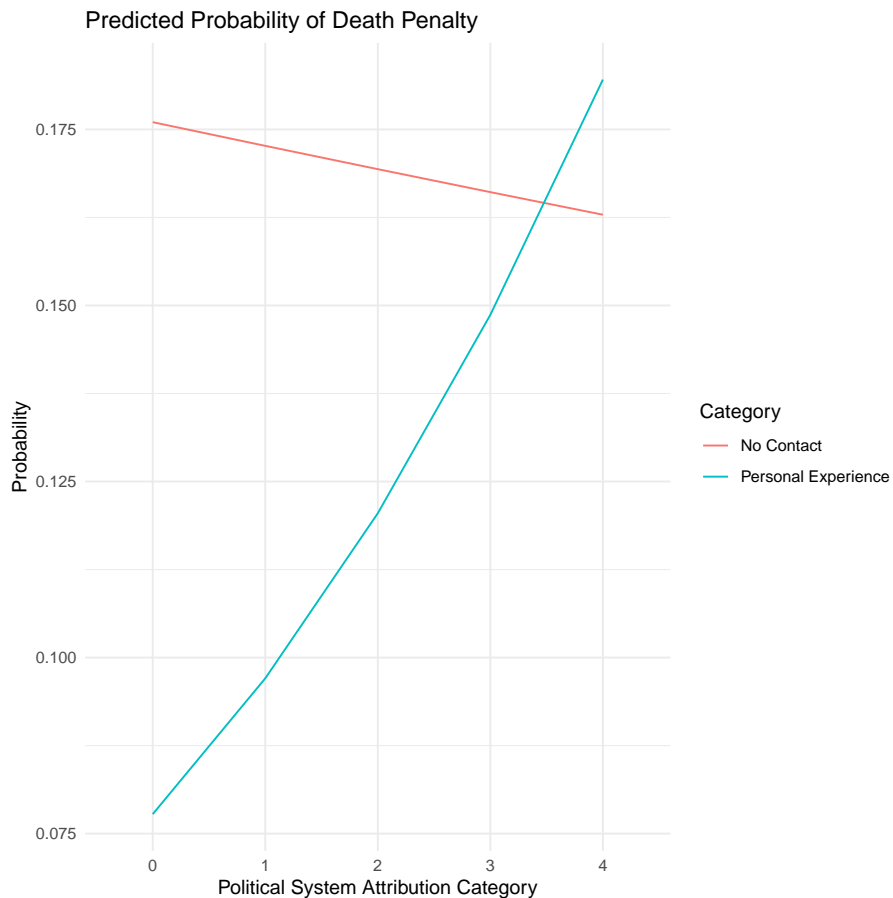
that the level of Political System Attribution is what matters in determining different outcomes. There is a significant effect for the Rape Sentence variable on the No Contact interaction – meaning that Political System Attribution affects the Rape Sentence variable differently for those with No Contact versus those with Personal Experience.

To visualize how Political System Attribution operates differently on the Rape Sentence variable, I create predicted probabilities for each group that reflect the likelihood of a respondent in that group choosing Death Sentence as their preferred punishment³. Here, it becomes clear that Political System Attribution is operating differently for Personal Experience and No Contact. For Political System Attribution Category 0, those with No Contact are more likely to support for the death penalty (.17) and those with Personal Experience are less

³Each control variable is held at the modal category.

likely (.08). However, as we move across Political System Attribution categories to category 4, the Personal Experience support jumps up and while the No Contact support for the Death Penalty slightly declines. For category 4, those with Personal Experience are more likely to support the death penalty (.18) than those with No Contact (.16). The slopes of the line clearly indicate that there is a difference for how Political System Attribution influences these two groups - with there being a stronger positive effect among those with Personal Experience and a weak negative effect among those with No Contact.

Figure 7.1: Comparison of the Predicted Probability of Supporting the Death Sentence by Political System Attribution for No Contact and Personal Experience



Future research can begin to hypothesize as to why some variables may be moderated by group, while others are not.

7.2.2 Effect of Political System Attribution on Women’s Rights Political Participation by Personal, Proximate, and No Contact

Next, I ran similar analyses for women’s rights political participation – as the dissertation found that Political System Attribution also significantly affects political participation. First, I present the means for each of the

groups for the individual scale items and the total scale below, along with the standard errors in parentheses and an indication of significance from other columns. Consistent with other findings, there continues to be a distinction between Personal Experience and No Contact, but not Personal Experience and Proximate Contact on all the scale items. However, there is a distinction between Personal and Proximate on the overall scale at the .07 level, with those with Personal Experience participating more. The appropriate regressions run with controls confirm that Personal Experience and No Contact are different and that when including controls, it also appears that Personal and Proximate become significantly different on the scale⁴. The significance between Personal Experience and Proximate Contact indicates that, in contrast to political attitudes, sexual assault is more mobilizing for political participation than having a loved one who has experienced it. This contrasts with the carceral state literature that has found that family members tend to be more mobilized than individuals who have been to prison (Anoll and Israel-Trummel, 2019; Walker, 2014).

⁴Table in Appendix.

Table 7.7: Mean of Women’s Rights Political Participation Items and Scale by Personal, Proximate and No Contact

	Personal Experience	Proximate Contact	No Contact	T-tests
Protest	.07 (.01)	.05 (.01)	.02 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p = .004*** Pers - Prox: .12
Contact Rep	.08 (.01)	.08 (.01)	.04 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: .99
Wear Something	.16 (.01)	BC .12 (.01)	AC .05 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .02 **
Donate Money	.12 (.01)	.11 (.01)	.05 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .56
Political Argument	.21 (.01)	.22 (.02)	.07 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .48
Petition	.28 (.01)	.25 (.02)	.11 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p = .20
Post on social media	.23 (.01)	.22 (.02)	.09 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p= .50
Volunteer	.12 (.01)	.08 (.01)	.04 (.01)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p= .06*
Total Scale	1.10 (.05)	0.92 (.06)	.41 (.04)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p=.07*

The moderation analysis⁵ sheds some light on whether the differences between groups are due to the initial differences in levels, or if Political System Attribution also has different effects among the groups. In the moderation analysis, none of the interaction terms on the participation scale are significant. This suggests that for women’s rights participation, Political System Attribution operates the same among groups and that initial differences in levels are what create the different outcomes in participation rather than Political System Attribution having a different effect across groups. Future research can be done to examine what creates the initial differences in Political System Attribution between the groups and why those with Personal Experience participate more than those with Proximate Contact and No Contact.

⁵Table in Appendix.

7.3 Effect of Attending Therapy by Personal, Proximate and No Contact

Next, I will examine if there are any differences between those with Personal Experience and No Contact and those with Personal Experience and Proximate Contact in terms of Attending Therapy, and if it appears that these level differences translate into meaningful effects on outcome variables. For this analysis, the Attending Therapy variable is the more general therapy – meaning they attended any type of therapy – rather than the specific therapy about sexual assault. The general measure is used because those who have not been personally assaulted were not asked if they had talked about assault in their therapy.

Below is the mean for Attending Therapy for each group. Here, we see that those with Personal Experience attend therapy significantly more than Proximate Contact and No Contact women, and that women with Proximate Contact attend more than those with No Contact. The fact that those with Personal Experience attend therapy more than the other groups raises some important questions. In the therapy chapter I found that Attending Therapy has almost no effects on the political attitude variables. However, since those with Personal Experience attend therapy more than the other groups it is possible that the effects of therapy are obscured by this higher attendance.

Table 7.8: Mean of Attending Therapy by Personal, Proximate and No Contact

	Personal Experience	Proximate Contact	No Contact	T-tests
Ever Attend Therapy	.51 (.02)	.40 (.02)	.25 (.02)	Pers- No: p<.001*** Prox - No: p<.001*** Pers - Prox: p<.001***

To examine if there are differences with controls, a binary logistic regression was run with Proximate Contact and No Contact as independent variables and Personal Experience as the suppressed variable. Here, we see that both No Contact and Proximate Contact remain significant, indicating that those with Personal Contact are more likely to attend therapy than both those with Proximate Contact and No Contact. There are also some demographic differences for who is more likely to attend therapy. For partisanship, Strong Republicans are less likely to attend therapy less than Strong Democrats and for race, Black, Latino and Asian respondents are less likely to report attending therapy in comparison to White respondents.

Table 7.9: Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Attending Therapy

	Attend Therapy
No Contact	-0.240*** (0.024)
Proximate Contact	-0.107*** (0.025)
Black	-0.069** (0.028)
Latino	-0.080** (0.037)
Asian	-0.102** (0.049)
Mixed	0.032 (0.033)
Middle East	-0.161 (0.180)
Native American	-0.150 (0.098)
Income	0.0004 (0.041)
Education	0.177*** (0.048)
Partisanship	-0.054* (0.032)
No Party	-0.102*** (0.032)
Age	-0.002 (0.001)
Constant	0.527*** (0.055)
Observations	2,255

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Thus far, the Attending Therapy results show that there appears to be a distinction between Personal Experience and No Contact, and Personal Experience and Proximate Contact in terms of Attending Therapy. Next, I will examine if it appears that this difference in level for Attending Therapy leads to any meaningful political differences.

7.3.1 Effect of Attending Therapy on Political Attitudes for Personal, Proximate and No Contact

To examine initial differences on the attitudinal variables, I ran ordered probit regressions with dummies for Attending Therapy, Proximate Contact and No Contact as the independent variables and Abortion Views, Accused Politician and Rape Sentence as the dependent variables. These regressions indicates that while No Contact remains distinct from Personal Experience for the Abortion variable, therapy does not appear to have any significant effects on the attitudes – though it does emerge as marginally significant for the Accused Politician variable.

Table 7.10: Effect of Attending Therapy on Political Attitudes with Group Indicators

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion Views	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
Attend Therapy	0.004 (0.013)	-0.017* (0.009)	-0.007 (0.007)
No Contact	-0.069*** (0.015)	-0.005 (0.010)	0.014 (0.009)
Proximate Contact	-0.003 (0.015)	-0.012 (0.010)	0.014 (0.009)
Black	-0.013 (0.017)	-0.001 (0.012)	0.004 (0.010)
Latino	-0.002 (0.023)	-0.009 (0.016)	0.029** (0.013)
Asian	-0.017 (0.030)	-0.007 (0.020)	0.045** (0.017)
Two+ Races	0.001 (0.021)	-0.020 (0.014)	0.015 (0.012)
Middle East	0.057 (0.111)	0.030 (0.080)	0.011 (0.063)
Native American	0.014 (0.061)	-0.001 (0.042)	0.041 (0.035)
Income	0.019 (0.025)	-0.015 (0.017)	-0.031** (0.014)
Partisanship	-0.365*** (0.020)	-0.032** (0.013)	0.032*** (0.011)
No Party	0.001 (0.020)	-0.055*** (0.015)	-0.075*** (0.012)
Education	0.118*** (0.030)	0.022 (0.021)	-0.051*** (0.017)
Age	-0.005*** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.00005 (0.0005)
Constant	0.947*** (0.035)	0.679*** (0.024)	0.778*** (0.020)
Observations	2,254	2,125	2,224

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
 Note: Cutpoints not shown

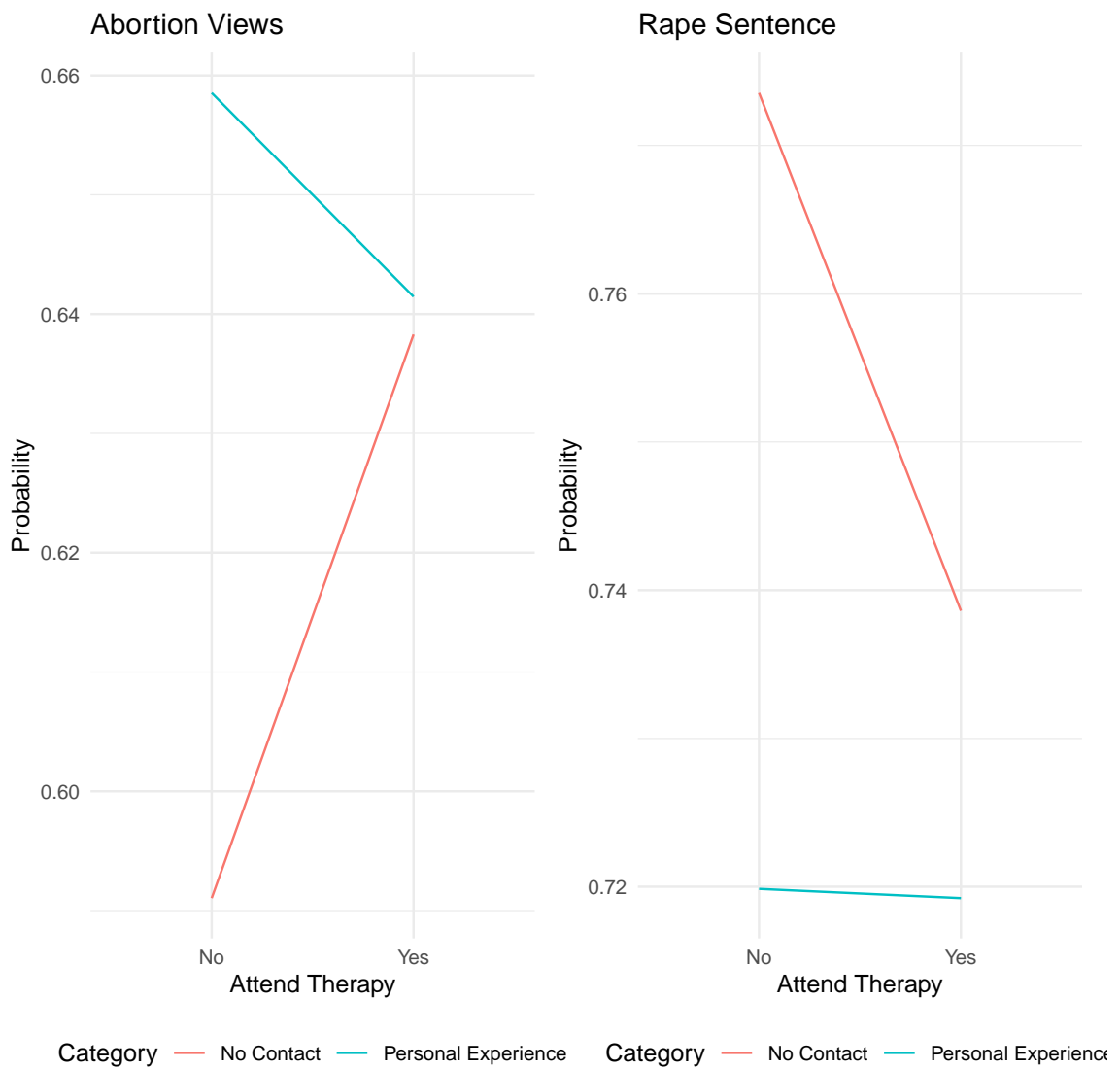
Next, as with Political System Attribution, moderation analyses were run to see if Attending Therapy has different effects within groups on the Political Attitudes and Oppressed Groups outcomes by interacting the Attending Therapy variable with a group indicator ⁶. There is a significant negative interaction between No Contact and Attending Therapy for the Rape Sentence variable and a positive interaction for the Abortion Variable. Interpreted substantively, this means that therapy has a different effect for those who are in the No Contact group versus in the Personal Experience group.

To see if it appears that this significant difference has a substantive effect, I ran the predicted probabilities of the No Contact and Personal Experience groups. While the effects are small, it does appear that therapy

⁶Table in Appendix.

affects those in the No Contact group differently than it does in the Personal Experience Group. For the Rape Sentence variable, the No Contact group has a predicted response of .77 for those who do not attend therapy and a response of .73 for those who do (a 4-point difference). The Personal Experience line stays the same for the Rape Sentence variable, with a predicted probability of .72, regardless of if someone has been to therapy or not. For the Abortion variable, therapy appears to be working in opposite directions, moving those in the No Contact group in the more liberal direction (from .59 to .64) and those in the Personal Contact group in the negative direction (from .66 to .64).

Figure 7.2: Predicted Probabilities of Abortion Views and Rape Sentence by Attending Therapy for Personal and No Contact



7.3.2 Effect of Attending Therapy on Views Towards Oppressed Groups by Personal, Proximate and No Contact

This section will continue the analyses by examining the Views Towards Oppressed Groups variables. First, I present the means of each group, with standard errors and t-tests to indicate significant differences between means. Like with the other outcome variables, there appears to be a distinction between those in the Personal Experience and No Contact groups, but not between the Personal Experience and Proximate Contact groups.

Table 7.11: Mean of Views Towards Oppressed Groups by Personal, Proximate and No Contact

	Personal Experience	Proximate Contact	No Contact	T-tests
Black People	.61 (.01)	.61 (.01)	.56 (.01)	Pers- No: p= .02** Prox - No: p= .01** Pers - Prox: p = .67
Undocumented Immigrants	.57 (.01)	.57 (.01)	.53 (.01)	Pers- No: p= .01** Prox - No: .02** Pers - Prox: p= .97
Women	.64 (.01)	.63 (.01)	.56 (.01)	Pers- No: p ;.001*** Prox - No: p ;.001*** Pers - Prox: .56
White People	.47 (.01)	.46 (.01)	.46 (.01)	Pers- No: .54 Prox - No: .95 Pers - Prox: .52
Men	.50 (.01)	.51 (.01)	.50 (.01)	Pers- No: p=.80 Prox - No: p= .46 Pers- Prox: p= .60

When controlling for demographics, No Contact continues to be distinct from Personal Experience, with those who are in the No Contact group being less empathetic to not only the oppressed out-groups of Black People and Undocumented Immigrants, but also their own in-group of Women in comparison to those with Personal Experience.

Next, I ran the moderation analysis with an interaction term between Attend Therapy and Proximate Contact and No Contact to account for different effect sizes within group. In the moderation analyses, there were no significant interactions between No Contact, Proximate Contact and Attending Therapy⁷. Because nothing reaches significance, this analysis shows that therapy does not appear to affect Views Towards Oppressed Groups for any of the categories of Personal Experience, Proximate Contact and No Contact, and that therapy does not seem to matter more for one group over another.

⁷Table in Appendix.

Table 7.12: Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Views Towards Oppressed Groups

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Black	Undoc Im	Women	Men	White
No Contact	-0.197** (0.094)	-0.189** (0.092)	-0.423*** (0.095)	-0.002 (0.091)	-0.034 (0.091)
Proximate	-0.042 (0.099)	-0.036 (0.096)	-0.117 (0.100)	0.050 (0.094)	-0.026 (0.094)
Black	1.197*** (0.121)	0.041 (0.108)	0.724*** (0.116)	0.235** (0.110)	-0.309*** (0.108)
Latino	0.266* (0.146)	0.445*** (0.148)	0.685*** (0.151)	0.306** (0.139)	-0.192 (0.144)
Asian	-0.010 (0.189)	0.010 (0.186)	0.127 (0.195)	0.077 (0.181)	-0.174 (0.183)
Two+ Races	0.508*** (0.131)	0.071 (0.131)	0.332** (0.132)	0.188 (0.128)	-0.193 (0.130)
Middle East	0.954 (0.734)	0.513 (0.799)	1.297 (0.834)	0.361 (0.767)	0.164 (0.623)
Native American	-0.343 (0.359)	0.331 (0.352)	-0.151 (0.365)	0.002 (0.348)	-0.399 (0.338)
Income	-0.050 (0.159)	-0.159 (0.157)	-0.353** (0.161)	-0.010 (0.155)	0.076 (0.155)
Partisanship	-0.778*** (0.126)	-0.591*** (0.126)	-0.632*** (0.128)	0.085 (0.122)	-0.035 (0.122)
No Party	0.011 (0.124)	0.0001 (0.121)	-0.010 (0.124)	0.328*** (0.124)	0.405*** (0.123)
Education	0.363* (0.191)	0.326* (0.187)	0.114 (0.193)	-0.074 (0.185)	-0.052 (0.184)
Age	-0.015*** (0.006)	-0.020*** (0.005)	-0.007 (0.006)	0.004 (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)
Observations	2,241	2,239	2,240	2,242	2,240

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
 Note: *Cutpoints not shown*

7.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented descriptive tests with the goal of understanding if those who have Personal Experience with sexual assault are distinct from those who have Proximate Contact and No Contact with sexual assault among a sample of women. It also aimed to understand if Political System Attribution and attending therapy have different effects on outcome variables for the various groups. Overall, the chapter demonstrates that on most dimensions those who have Personal Experience with sexual assault are distinct from those who have No Contact. On every dimension - political attitudes, political participation, and views towards oppressed groups - those with No Contact are distinct from those with Personal Experience. On the other hand, there is not much distinction between those with Personal Experience and Proximate Contact - with the only significant result being in political participation. Thus far, my dissertation has shown that for some women, sexual assault is a transformative experience that affects the ways that they interact with politics. This chapter

further shows that not having personal experience oneself, but having a loved one experience assault may also be a transformative experience. There are a few implications that come from this finding.

First, is the idea that individuals who have loved ones who have been assaulted, but who have not experienced assault personally, may have less mental burden and therefore may be more able to engage in political behavior related to assault. This is consistent with literature that finds those who have loved ones in the carceral state are more mobilized than the person who is incarcerated (Walker, 2014; Anoll and Israel-Trummel, 2019). So, while the experience may not be as personal, having the distance from the mental toll of assault may result in situations where strong effects are still able to develop. However, the results may be limited to political attitudes and may not extend to political participation.

Second is the implication that disclosure and discussion of sexual assault matters. Most survivors only reveal their experience to a small group of people, and those people are almost always women (Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings, 2010). This work shows that it is possible that if women continue to be vocal about their experiences, it could have widespread impact on views towards women's rights as those with loved ones who have been assaulted are affected. Future work may also examine if this impact of disclosure is limited to women or if men who have knowledge of loved ones who have been assaulted are also moved in more liberal directions on their views towards women's rights and women's rights political participation. This would build on work that has shown that men who have daughters do tend to move in a more feminist direction on their policy positions (Glynn and Sen, 2015; Washington, 2008). Overall, this chapter brings up important ideas surrounding how the discussion or knowledge of sexual assault creates similar effects to personally experiencing sexual assault.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

The main objective of this dissertation was to investigate if there are meaningful differences among survivors of sexual assault in terms of political behavior, and then to develop a theory to explain some of these differences. This conclusion chapter will proceed by first addressing the main goal by providing a summary of the meaningful variations and outcomes examined throughout the project. It will then address how the dissertation broadly fits into and contributes political science literature and concludes with a discussion of what this dissertation means for American Politics research moving forward.

8.1 Discussion of Main Objective

The main objective of this dissertation was to demonstrate to the reader that there are meaningful variations among sexual assault survivors that translate into political outcomes.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I introduced the stories of five women: Kaitlyn, Courtney, Michelle, Rebecca, and Sienna. All women came from similar walks of life, and all had been sexually assaulted at some point. Yet, the women reacted in different ways to their assaults. From different levels of acceptance, self-forgiveness, blame, and actions – the women demonstrate that there is no universal or correct reaction to sexual assault.

Variation among the survivors was also reflected in the way that the women interacted with politics. Some women were activists for sexual assault, putting their position as a survivor front and center for the world to see. Others were more subtle and behind the scenes in their political behavior – slowly shifting their ideas of what women should be or do over time. Some women stayed out of politics all together or engaged in political activities completely unrelated to their sexual assault.

The variations in both reactions and political behavior qualitatively show that sexual assault is a cognitively messy concept and means different things for different people. This variation is the motivation behind the main research question of this project: When will sexual assault affect the political behavior of survivors?

This project was specifically designed to understand how variation within the group of sexual assault survivors leads to different political outcomes. As women's rights have taken center stage since high profile events such as the #MeToo movement in 2017 and the 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson Health Supreme Court decision, understanding factors that affect the political behavior of a sizeable population of women is something that is instructive not just for academics, but for practitioners and anyone dedicated to making the world a more equal place for women.

I approached this project using a grounded theory approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with 16 survivors of sexual assault to develop theories about what variations may matter specifically for political outcomes. I then quantitatively tested these theories using a representative survey of women aged 18-45 in the United States, specifically examining the subset of women who were sexual assault survivors. Through the grounded theory, I developed three distinct theories that propose how variation in reaction to sexual assault can affect political behaviors:

Political System Attribution

The first theory, Theory 1 (Political System Attribution), stated: Women who have been sexually assaulted who attribute responsibility for their assault to the political system will be more liberal on public policies related to women's bodily autonomy and participate more in politics related to women's rights than women who have been sexually assaulted who do not attribute any responsibility to the political system.

The Political System Attribution is based on the understanding that women develop different attribution of blame for their assault and the way that they place this blame will affect their subsequent behavior. Some individuals will blame patriarchy, rape culture and the way that women are treated, which conveys a political understanding because it shows that women see their subordination as something rooted in political structures (Kessel, 2022). On the other hand, some women will place their blame for assault in different ways that do not have political implications – such as blaming the individuals themselves or non-political entities such as the family structure. The theory was inspired by two contrasting quotes from respondents Kaitlyn and Courtney, who attributed blame to the patriarchy/rape culture and the family respectively.

“[The cause is]I would say a boy who... a man who enacted rape culture... But I would say the cause is that he ignored my no, the cause is that he ignored me. And all of those things are rape culture and also personal choices within that.”

- Kaitlyn

“How I feel about drinking or having sex, I know a lot of people want to mix that with politics, but I don't. Those things don't interact with my political beliefs.” . . .

“It's [sexual assault] an issue...I think in the end, it's everyone's choice and you have to genuinely want to raise your own kids and not let a tablet raise them.”

- Courtney

Overall, there was strong support for this theory. When examining political attitudes, political system

attribution affected two out of three (Accused Politicians and Rape Sentence) variables. It also had a strong effect on political participation, with those who had high Political System Attribution more likely to participate in acts related to women's rights than those with low political system attribution.

Attending Therapy

Theory 2 stated: Women who have been sexually assaulted who have been to therapy will be more likely to attribute responsibility to the political system, will have more liberal attitudes on political attitudes and express more empathy towards oppressed groups than women who have been sexually assaulted who have not been to therapy.

This theory was inspired by the respondents who talked in depth about the positive effects therapy had on them, however, the results from these tests were mostly null. The null results indicate that Attending Therapy does not have a significant effect on the political attitudes, views towards oppressed groups or political participation concerning women's rights for survivors of sexual assault. However, it is possible that I did not operationalize therapy correctly or did not capture the experience of therapy well enough – future research could continue to build on these null findings.

Survivor/Victim Identity

The last theory, Theory 3 stated: People who have been sexually assaulted who self-label as a Survivor or Victim will have more liberal attitudes on policies related to women's bodily autonomy and freedom, will have more empathy towards oppressed groups and will participate in politics more than people who have been sexually assaulted who do not self-label as a Survivor or Victim.

Identities are powerful forces when they are connected to politics Huddy (2013). This last theory was inspired by women who discussed the importance of being a 'Survivor' of 'Victim' to their worldview, as demonstrated by Kaitlyn below.

“Yeah, like to be honest, [the sexual assault] helped me to identify as one of many. It helped me to say I'm not the only one...The reason “victim” means so much to me as an identifier is that for the first time of my life, I think I felt in solidarity with other people who struggled and have been victims of systems of oppression.”

- Kaitlyn

Overall, the results for this theory were strong. Only one of three tests were significant for the attitudes (Rape Sentence). However, a Survivor/Victim identity has a significant effect on views towards both oppressed out-groups and on the women's rights political participation scale. This demonstrates that there is

a significant effect among survivors who develop a Survivor/Victim Identity and that identifying as a Survivor/Victim operates as a political identity for some women (Huddy, 2013).

Analysis of Personal Experience, Proximate Contact and No Contact

The last tests explored variation looked not just among survivors, but between these survivors and two other groups of women: those who have not been assaulted and those who have not been assaulted but have a close family member or friend who has. These comparisons were run to examine if the meaningful variation among sexual assault survivors is limited to the group, or if the concepts are more indicative of variation in women in general. After running the tests, it appears that women who have been assaulted and those who have close family members act in ways that are indistinguishable from each other except for political participation. However, women who have personal experience or who have close friends or family who have been assaulted are distinctly more liberal than those with no contact with assault on abortion attitudes, views towards oppressed groups and are more likely to participate in political participation concerning women's rights. This significance is reflected in the fact that almost all tests on political attitudes, political participation and views towards oppressed groups between Personal Experience/Proximate Contact and No Contact are significant.

Contributions

Beyond the main findings of the dissertation, I hope to highlight how this dissertation fits into and contributes to the larger political science literature. I trace out connections to three important lines: Crime/Victimization, Life Changes and Gender and Politics.

Currently, the study of the effects of crime in American politics remains understudied. Rather, to understand how being the victim of a crime can affect political participation we must turn to contexts outside of the United States. This literature typically shows that being the victim of a crime has a positive effect on political participation (Bateson, 2012; Blattman, 2009; Dorff, 2017). However, these studies usually treat crime victimization as a binary variable. I build upon this literature by proposing that being a victim of the crime is not always enough to effect participation. I show that reactions to the crime such as Political System Attribution can vary among the victims, and that this variation may be what creates the increased participation. Future work can examine who develops Political System Attribution and who does not, potentially exploring the influence of concepts like partisanship, social networks, and media on the development of Political System Attribution. I also attempt to bring the study of these victimization experiences to the American context. America is a country that does have crime, discrimination, and traumatizing events. While these events may not be as prevalent as they are in other countries, they still have very real and tangible effects on the people

who must endure them.

This dissertation also adds to the life changes literature. This line of literature shows that exogenous events such as marriage, widowhood, having a baby and moving can all have effects on political attitudes and participation (Stoker and Jennings, 1995; Hobbs, Christakis and Fowler, 2014; Kam, Kirshbaum and Chojnacki, 2022; Highton, 2000). By studying sexual assault, I add an additional layer by examining a significant event that may have different types of consequences. Marsh (2022) finds that traumatic events decrease turnout (which may be contrary to what the crime literature would imply), but that social identities can condition this effect. I find something similar by demonstrating that while sexual assault is not always mobilizing, it can be under certain circumstances. My research adds to this literature by showing not just that there is an effect of a life event, but by providing mechanisms and reasons for why it may affect some individuals but not others.

Lastly this dissertation contributes to the literature that aims to understand how explicitly gendered events affect women in the mass public. In American politics, gendered effects are often subsumed by partisan or racial effects (Hayes, 2011; Huddy and Carey, 2009) and when effects are found, the literature is focused more on the experiences of female elites rather than the mass public (Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo, 2019; Saha and Weeks, 2020; Bauer, 2015; Dolan, 2010). Here, I have provided a clear instance where gendered experiences in the mass public have concrete effects, and that these effects hold across a wide range of demographics. Additionally, I contribute to the gender and politics literature by expanding the study of gendered events beyond the important study of sexual harassment that has emerged since 2017's #MeToo movement (Craig and Cossette, 2020; Bankert, 2020; Castle et al., 2020; Jose, Fowler and Raj, 2019).

8.2 What does this dissertation mean for the study of politics in America?

Thus far, I have shown that there is variation in survivors' reactions to sexual assault and subsequent political outcomes and have provided context for how this dissertation fits into the broader study of politics. Lastly, I want to directly address some of the implications for politics moving forward and how those implications can be useful to other researchers and practitioners.

Implication 1: If people do not think something is connected to politics, it will not change their political behavior. My variable, Political System Attribution, is something that I think can be widely applied to understanding reactions to a variety of events moving forward.

- For researchers: The concept of Political System Attribution highlights that there are some prerequisites that must be met before some events can change political behavior. While some events have effects on political participation regardless of how someone interprets it because they increase the costs of participating (Kam, Kirshbaum and Chojnacki, 2022; Highton, 2000), other events inherently change

how someone interacts with politics by changing their priorities (Krosnick, 1990). For the events that change how someone interacts with politics, a connection between the event and potential political actions will need to be made before the changes are visible. Researchers could continue to develop Political System Attribution by exploring circumstances where it matters in terms of political behavior and when it does not. For example, Political System Attribution may affect the political actions of survivors of school shootings and their views towards gun control. I would predict that some survivors of school shootings will be more likely to blame larger systems like gun laws and the National Rifle Association, whereas others will point to the individual as an evil person but claim that the gun laws had nothing to do with the shooting. Those who blame the larger organizations are probably more likely to take actions that advocate for changes in laws or policies regarding guns than those who attribute the cause of the shooting to the individual evil person.

- For practitioners: Practitioners interested in how to mobilize groups of Americans with experiences that are not frequently talked about or discussed in political ways may want to think about how to make clearer connections between their cause and politics to eventually mobilize these groups.

Implication 2: Experiencing one type of victimizing event can make someone more empathetic to others who experience a different type of victimizing event – especially when someone forms an identity around their event.

- For Researchers – The increased empathy that survivors display implies that cross-cutting identities that create empathy are not only applicable to minority groups, as found in previous research (Sirin, Valentino and Villalobos, 2017) but may apply to broader categories as well. Researchers can continue to examine if other identities create this same empathy, or if the identities have effects that extend beyond empathy such as political participation on behalf of other groups.
- For practitioners – Practitioners who are interested in creating coalitions for a cause may be especially interested in understanding how to increase feelings of empathy towards their group to eventually mobilize. The practitioners may be able to do this by engaging with overlapping identities that have an empathetic lens to them. By increasing empathy for their cause, they may be able to mobilize more people in support who had not previously thought about the cause.

Implication 3: The exploratory research in Chapter 6 that shows that similarities between those with personal experience and those with loved ones with experiences suggests that when women talk about assault with each other, it changes their attitudes and behavior. This implies as invisible topics are made more visible, people become more likely to engage.

- For Researchers – Researchers interested in understanding how public opinion towards women’s rights concepts forms may find this implication useful. Here, I provide a circumstance where it appears that being the confidant of a sexual assault survivor affects and potentially changes political attitudes - which may change public opinion.
- For practitioners – Those interested in increasing support for women’s rights and increasing participation could develop ways for women to be publicly vocal about their experiences. We see this demonstrated in events like Speak Outs now, but there are many ways practitioners could encourage increased public discourse about sexual assault leading to more attitude change and mobilization.

8.3 Conclusion

This project was borne out of a simple observation: sometimes sexual assault survivors seem to participate in politics more after their assault, and sometimes they do not. Throughout the project, I discussed the personal experiences of 16 women who helped me to piece together the potential heterogeneity in experiences that may create this difference in political behavior. I introduced three concepts that may matter: Political System Attribution, Attending Therapy, and a Survivor/Victim Identity. Ultimately, I found that both Political System Attribution and a Survivor/Victim Identity have meaningful impact on the political behavior of survivors and can help explain why some survivors do or do not seem to be affected in a political way.

To close, I want to present a quote from the very first respondent I interviewed, Faye. In this quote, Faye is reflecting on her own increased political participation and empathy, but the quote can also summarize the intention of this dissertation. While this research may only be a drop in the bucket, my hope is that it provides a foundation for future researchers, practitioners and any individual interested in knowing more about how sexual assault can potentially affect the behavior of individuals.

“If I have one lifetime to do something, why not do something that might make some sort of positive impact?”

-Faye

Appendix A

Chapter 2 Appendix

Figure A.1: Interview Guide

"This is a research study about how experiencing a sexual assault affects the lives of individuals afterwards and specifically how sexual assault affects the way that individuals interact with politics. The interview generally lasts between 1-2 hours. As with most research studies, there are inherent risks to participating in the study. For this specific study, the questions I would like to talk about deal with reflecting on a difficult event and could at times bring up intense emotions, uncomfortable self judgements and distressing memories and could potentially cause discomfort. Your participation in this study is important. However, participation is completely voluntary and should you at any time wish to stop, not answer a specific question, or end the interview, you may do so without prejudice to you and you will still receive any benefits you are entitled to. Your participation in this study is strictly confidential and your information will be protected to the best of my ability. All personally identifying information will be removed. If you would like to voice any comments or concerns about the research process you are welcome to contact me, the Principal Investigator, or the IRB office at Vanderbilt University. Additionally, if you have any questions about research participants rights you may contact the HRPP office at Vanderbilt University. Please feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board Office at (615) 322-2918 or toll free at (866) 224-8273 and me, the Principal Investigator: Lauren Chojnacki at lauren.m.chojnacki@vanderbilt.edu or my faculty advisor, Cindy Kam, at cindy.d.kam@vanderbilt.edu. For your participation in this project, I will send you a \$25 gift card to the email address you used to contact me Do you have any questions at this stage? Do you have any questions at this stage?"

I would like to record this conversation if you feel comfortable with me doing so. This will allow me to make sure that I am able to accurately recall and portray your responses in the research project. Only myself and a research assistant will have access to this data and I will begin recording after our introductions to each other so that your name or other identifying information will not be included in the transcript unless you provide this over the course of the interview. The interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim by professional and confidential audio transcription software Otter.ai and an additional recording will be recorded and stored locally on my computer. If you would prefer me to not use otter and just record on my computer that is also an option that is available to you. No one except for myself and research assistants will hear the full transcripts of the interview, and any quotes used will be kept completely anonymous. If you would like a full transcript of the interview afterwards to approve, this will be provided to you with the option to redact any information you would like. Do you have any questions about Otter.ai or how your transcript will be handled? Do you have any questions about the research project and your participation in general?"

'Your participation in this study is strictly confidential and your information will be protected to the best of my ability. Because a consent document would be the only physical thing documenting your participation to this research, you do not need to sign a consent document so as to not create this record. However, if you would like to sign a consent document, our team will provide you with one over email and store it securely after your sign it'

Date of IRB Approval: 10/30/2021

Institutional Review Board



Interview Guide

1. *To start, can you tell me about yourself?*
 - a. *Get age, edu level, income, general feel for where they live*
2. *How do you feel about American Politics? a. Probing: political party, political participation*
3. *Can you tell me your views on Donald Trump?*
4. *How about the #MeToo and #Time'sUp movements that took place a few years ago?*

Section 2: Substantive Questions:

2. *Including as little or as much detail as you want, can you tell me about the event that led you to sit down for this interview?*
3. *What were your initial feelings and reactions after the event?*
4. *Did you tell anyone about this event?*
5. *How do you interpret this event in terms of its causes? Has this changed over time?*
6. *What does this event mean to you now?*
7. *Do you feel that this event has influenced the way you interact with the world?*
8. *Do you think it influences how other people interact with the world?*
7. *Oftentimes we can dwell on the negatives of these events, and they truly are negative, but I am curious to know if there is anything you are proud about in the way that you have handled the event and moved forward in your life?*
8. *Is there anything else you think I should know?*

Section 3: Wind down

1. *How are you feeling after answering these questions?*
2. *Are there any questions I asked that made you extremely uncomfortable? How could I adjust this question?*
3. *Are you ready to go back to your day?*

Date of IRB Approval: 10/30/2021

Institutional Review Board



Figure A.2: Participation Flyer

IRB #211756



Call for participants: Study on how sexual assault affects the political values and views of woman survivors

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore if sexual assault affects the political actions, decisions and values of survivors.

Participation and Duration: Participation will consist of a 1-2 hour interview.

Location: Interviews with people who do not reside in Nashville, TN will take place over Zoom. Respondents who live in Nashville, TN can choose to conduct the interview face to face in Nashville, TN or over Zoom.

Compensation and Benefits: Respondents will be compensated with a \$25 online gift card of their choice to Amazon, Walmart, Target or Starbucks.

Eligibility:

- You must be 18+ years of age
- You identify as a woman
- You consider yourself to be a survivor of sexual assault
- You are NOT a student at Vanderbilt University

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Participation is completely confidential and any identifying information obtained from the interview will be deleted or changed so that you remain anonymous.

Please pass this information on to anyone who might be interested

For more information or to participate in the study, please contact:

Lauren Chojnacki
PhD Candidate, Vanderbilt University
lauren.m.chojnacki@vanderbilt.edu

Appendix B

Chapter 3 Appendix

Figure B.1: Survey Instrument

Agreement

The study is being conducted by researchers at the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. This study is strictly for research purposes. The researchers are not affiliated in any way with any organization other than Vanderbilt University. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and it should take up to 11 minutes of your time. The purpose of this study is to better understand the political views of women. You will be asked to answer questions on a wide variety of topics, including questions about possible experiences with sexual assault. We know that these are personal questions, so we do not ask your name or other identifying information. Your information is completely confidential. By agreeing to participate, you acknowledge and accept this condition. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may discontinue the study at any time.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study, please contact Lauren Chojnacki at lauren.m.chojnacki@vanderbilt.edu. For additional information about your rights as a research participant in this study, please feel free to contact the Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board Office at (615) 322-2918 or toll free at (866) 224-8273.

In consideration of all of the above, I give my agreement to participate in this research study. By selecting "I agree to participate in this study" you signify that you voluntarily agree to participate. If you select "I do NOT agree to participate in this study" you will be taken to the final screen.

- I agree to participate in this study
- I do NOT agree to participate in this study

Controls and Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
 - a. Less than high school
 - b. High school graduate - - High school diploma or equivalent (e.g. GED)
 - c. Some college but no degree
 - d. Associate degree in college – occupational/vocational or academic
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Post-graduate degree (MBA; JD; PhD)
3. Please mark the answer that includes the income of all members of your family during the past 12 months before taxes.
 - a. Less than \$20,000
 - b. \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - c. \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - d. \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - e. \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - f. Over \$100,000

- g. Over \$250,000
- 4. What racial or ethnic group best describes you?
 - a. White
 - b. Black
 - c. Hispanic or Latino
 - d. Asian
 - e. Native American
 - f. Middle Eastern
 - g. Other [clarify]
 - h. Not sure

Module: Policy positions

- 1. Which of the following comes closest to your views on abortion?
 - a. It should always be legal
 - b. It should be legal with some limitations
 - c. It should be illegal except for rape, incest or to save a mother's life
 - d. It should always be illegal

Sex Ed Questions

- 2. How important do you think it is to have sex education in public high schools?
 - a. Very Important
 - b. Somewhat Important
 - c. Not Important
 - d. Not Important at all
- 3. Do you believe the following topics should be covered in sex education classes taught in public high schools?

	Yes	No
Birth control methods (e.g. the pill, IUD, birth control shot)		
Consent in sexual relationships		
Abstinence (refraining from sex until marriage) as a way to prevent pregnancy and disease		
Sexual morality through abstinence		

- 4. Do you favor or oppose requiring employers to provide employees with health care plans that cover contraception or birth control at no cost?
 - a. Strongly favor
 - b. Somewhat favor

- c. Neither favor nor oppose
- d. Somewhat oppose
- e. Strongly oppose

Module: Political System Attribution

Which of these factors do you believe **contribute** to the incidence of sexual assault in the United States?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Perpetrators with bad morals and intentions			
Media and technology			
Women wearing revealing or immodest clothing when they go out			
Cultural acceptance or indifference towards violence against women			
Parents are not raising their boys with good morals and values			
Not enough laws and policies, or laws that are not strong enough, to deter perpetrators			

Which of the following factors do you believe can **help reduce** the incidence of sexual assault in the United States?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Harsher legal punishments for perpetrators			
Individuals holding perpetrators in their lives more accountable (ie: socially shaming)			

Women wearing more modest clothing when they go out			
Organizing to prevent and raise awareness of violence against women			
Raising boys with better moral values			
Requiring employers to implement sexual harassment and sexual assault training for their employees			

Module: Support for Oppressed Groups

1. For each of the following groups, how concerned do you feel about the challenges they face in our society? (Randomize order)

	Very Concerned	Concerned	Neither Concerned or Not concerned	Not very concerned	Not concerned at all
Black people					
Undocumented Immigrants					
White people					
Women					
Men					

Module: Sexual Assault Related Policies:

1. Many police departments are understaffed in a wide variety of divisions or units. Of the following units, which units do you think police departments should prioritize when making staffing decisions?
 - a. General Patrol (ie traffic stops, first responding patrol units)
 - b. Sex Crime Investigations
 - c. Homicide (Murder) Investigations
 - d. Drug Offense Investigations

- e. Other [text box]
- f. None of these departments should be prioritized in terms of staffing
- g. Don't know

What do you think is the appropriate sentence for someone who is guilty of the following crimes?

	No Punishment	Probation	Short Prison Term (under 1 year)	Medium Prison Term (1-10 years)	Long Prison term (11-24 years)	Life Prison Term (25+years, for life)	Death Sentence
Drug Possession							
Murder							
Rape							

- 2. What do you think should happen if an elected official has been accused of rape?
 - a. The official should resign
 - b. An investigation should occur, and the official should be temporarily suspended until the investigation has concluded and the official is found guilty or innocent
 - c. An investigation should occur, and the official should not stop attending to their duties until the investigation has concluded and the official is found guilty or innocent
 - d. The official should publicly apologize but should face no further consequences
 - e. Nothing should happen
 - f. Don't know

Module: Views towards Policing, Criminal Justice system

- 3. Do you support or oppose the “defund the police” movement?
 - a. Strongly Support
 - b. Somewhat Support
 - c. Neither Support or Oppose
 - d. Somewhat Oppose
 - e. Strongly Oppose

Module: Sensitive Questions

The following question concerns sexual experiences that you or people close to you may have had that were unwanted. We know that these are personal questions, so we do not ask your name or other identifying information. Your information is completely confidential. We hope that this helps you to feel comfortable answering the question honestly.

1. Do you have a close family member or friend who has been the victim of sexual assault or rape?
 - a. I have a close family member or friend who has been a victim of sexual assault or rape
 - b. I do not have a close family member or friend that I know of who was the victim of sexual assault or rape

2. Please indicate if the following has happened to **you** in your lifetime: Someone has sexually harassed, has fondled, kissed, OR rubbed up against the private areas of your body (lips, breast/chest, crotch or butt) OR removed some of your clothes without your consent (*but did not attempt sexual penetration*)
 - a. Has happened to me
 - b. Has not happened to me
 - c. Don't know

3. Please indicate if the following has happened to **you** in your lifetime: Someone had oral sex with you or made you have oral sex without your consent OR Someone put their penis, fingers or objects into your vagina without your consent OR someone put their penis, fingers or objects into your butt without your consent.
 - a. Has happened to me
 - b. Has not happened to me
 - c. Don't know

IF "HAS HAPPENED TO ME FOR ASSAULT IS SELECTED"

4. Did this unwanted sexual contact take place on a university or college campus?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to say

IF "YES" is selected

5. Did you ever report the unwanted sexual contact to university authorities?
 - a. I did report to university authorities
 - b. I did not report to university authorities

6. Did you ever report the unwanted sexual contact to the police?
 - a. I did report to police
 - b. I did not report to police

IF "I DID REPORT TO THE POLICE OR UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE OFFICIALS " IS SELECTED

7. Taking the whole experience into account, how satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the [police/university/college officials]?
 - a. Very Satisfied
 - b. Somewhat Satisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Somewhat Dissatisfied
 - e. Very Dissatisfied

Module: Attending Therapy

1. Before we continue, when we use the word 'therapy', we mean talking to a mental-health professional--such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or marriage and family therapist--on a regular basis about problems or things that are bothering you. This can be either alone on a one-on-one basis or in a group setting. Which of the following best describes your experience with therapy or counseling for mental health?
 - a. I am considering therapy or counseling, but haven't actively sought it out
 - b. I am actively seeking out therapy or counseling, but have not started treatment yet
 - c. I am receiving therapy or counseling in person or virtually (such as over video, phone or text)
 - d. I have received therapy or counseling in the past, but am not longer seeking out therapy.
 - e. I am not considering seeking out therapy or counseling

Branch

If "I am considering therapy or counseling, but haven't actively sought it out" or "I am not considering seeking out therapy or counseling " is selected

2. What is the main reason you have not sought out therapy or mental health counseling?
 - a. I do not need it
 - b. It is not available in the areas where I currently live
 - c. I don't know how to get this
 - d. I can't afford it
 - e. I am not eligible for it
 - f. The available services do not understand my cultural background and preferences
 - g. Other (specify) [text box]

If "I am receiving therapy or counseling in person or virtually (such as over video, phone or text)

3. Why did you seek out mental health or counseling sessions?
 - a. [open ended text box]
4. Have you ever discussed instances of unwanted sexual contact in your mental health or counseling sessions?
 - a. Yes

- b. No
 - c. Don't Know
5. How long have you been attending mental health or counseling sessions?
- a. Less than 3 months
 - b. 3 months or more

If "I have received therapy or counseling in the past, but am not longer seeking out therapy" is selected

1. Why did you seek out mental health or counseling sessions in the past?
 - a. [open ended box]
2. Did you ever discuss instances of unwanted sexual contact in your mental health or counseling sessions?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. How long did you attend mental health or counseling sessions?
 - a. Less than 3 months
 - b. 3 months or more
4. What is the main reason you no longer attend mental health or counseling sessions?
 - a. I no longer need it
 - b. This is no longer available in the area where I currently live
 - c. I don't know how to get this or do this anymore
 - d. I can't afford it
 - e. I am no longer eligible for it
 - f. The available services did not understand my cultural background and preferences
 - g. Other (specify) [text box]

If "I am actively seeking out therapy or counseling, but have not started treatment yet" is selected

1. Why did you seek out mental health or counseling sessions?
 - a. [open ended box]

Module: Survivor or Victim Identity (Sexual assault only)

"Next, we are curious about how you feel about the words "survivor" and "victim" in relation to unwanted sexual experiences you have had in your life.

1. Which of the following words better describes yourself?
 - a. Survivor
 - b. Victim
 - c. Both words describe me
 - d. Neither word describes me

If they click “Survivor” or “Both words describe me”

2. “If someone told me I had no right to call myself a ‘real survivor’ I would be upset.
 - a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree

If they click “Victim” or “Both words describe me”

3. “If someone told me I had no right to call myself a ‘real victim’ I would be upset.
 - a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree

Module: Political Participation

Have you personally done any of the following in the past 12 months?

	Yes	No
Joined in a protest, march, rally, or demonstration, in support of a particular candidate or cause		
Worn a button or piece of clothing, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign/flag in your window or in front of your house in support of a particular candidate or cause		
Given any money in support of a particular candidate or cause		
Gotten into a political argument with someone in person or online		
Signed a petition online or on paper about a political or social issue		
Posted on social media in support of a particular candidate or cause		
Contacted or tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representative		
Devoted any time to volunteer work		

Were any of these actions due to women’s rights issues? [populate what they put in]

	Yes	No
X		

Y		
---	--	--

If respondent checks an event:

Can you please specify how this was related to women's rights? [open ended text box for each one]

Module: Partisanship

1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an independent, or what?
 - a. Democrat
 - b. Republican
 - c. Independent
 - d. Other party (specify)

Branch

If DEMOCRAT is selected

2. Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?
 - a. Strong
 - b. Not very strong

If REPUBLICAN is selected

3. Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?
 - a. Strong
 - b. Not very strong

If INDEPENDENT or OTHER is selected

4. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?
 - a. Closer to Republican
 - b. Closer to Democratic
 - c. Neither

Open ended module:

This survey has gathered your views on a wide variety of topics, including sexual assault and rape. For this last question, we are curious if there is anything else you would like to share with the researchers concerning your feelings towards sexual assault, rape, or violence against women. If so, please use the text box below, if not, click 'next' to complete the survey.

[open end]

Resources on closing screen

Thank you for taking this survey.

If you are a survivor of rape or sexual assault and would like additional resources, you can call the free and confidential national sexual assault hotline at 1-800-656-4673 or go to <https://www.rainn.org/> to chat with a live advocate. You can find additional information about rape and sexual assault at <https://www.rainn.org/>.

Appendix C

Chapter 4 Appendix

Table C.1: Distribution of Abortion Opinions

Opinion	Frequency (N)
It should always be illegal	55
It should be illegal except for rape, incest or to save a mother's life	223
It should be legal with some limitations	250
It should always be legal	388

Table C.2: Distribution of Accused Politician Opinions

Punishment	Frequency (N)
No punishment	6
Minor investigation	120
Major investigation	621
Resignation	150
Don't know	19

Table C.3: Distribution of Rape Sentence Opinions

Punishment	Frequency (N)
No punishment	2
Probation	9
Short Prison Sentence	18
Medium Prison Sentence	104
Long Prison Sentence	285
Life Prison Sentence	333
Death Penalty	165

Table C.4: Effect of Political System Attribution on All Crime Outcomes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Rape Sentence	Drug Sentence	Murder
Political System Attribution	0.971*** (0.233)	0.092 (0.232)	1.202*** (0.239)
Black	0.239 (0.173)	0.575*** (0.173)	-0.054 (0.181)
Latino	0.028 (0.246)	0.473** (0.241)	0.194 (0.246)
Native American	0.529 (0.511)	0.276 (0.500)	0.478 (0.537)
Middle East	-0.493 (1.146)	0.886 (0.978)	-1.159 (0.930)
Two+ Races	0.383** (0.182)	0.093 (0.188)	0.018 (0.193)
Asian	0.894** (0.438)	0.766* (0.446)	-0.096 (0.462)
Education	-0.875*** (0.307)	0.427 (0.320)	-0.978*** (0.320)
Income	-0.302 (0.260)	-0.380 (0.267)	-0.017 (0.273)
Partisanship	0.557*** (0.200)	0.789*** (0.203)	0.773*** (0.208)
No Party	-0.553** (0.234)	0.647*** (0.221)	-0.486** (0.242)
Age	0.0004 (0.009)	-0.003 (0.009)	0.028*** (0.009)
Observations	913	912	911

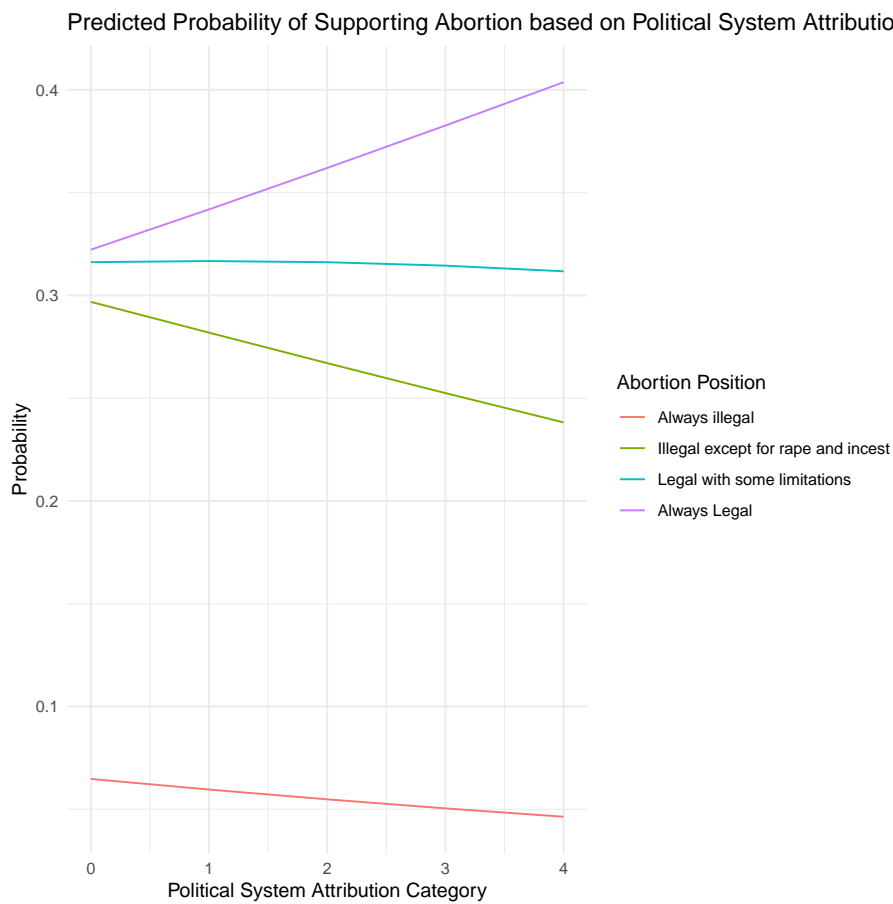
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cutpoints not shown

Predicted Probabilities of Abortion

While the abortion variable was not significant in the analysis, it still may be useful to present the difference in predicted probabilities. Abortion is an important policy to examine because it is one of the most prominent examples of a policy that concerns women’s bodily autonomy. While it is not specifically tied to rape, language surrounding exceptions to abortion typically include rape and incest, and many of the most gruesome media stories supporting why abortion is necessary include rape victims as examples . Therefore, for someone who attributes rape to the political system, there may be a stronger connection to abortion views and a preference for more liberal policies concerning abortion.

Figure C.1: Predicted Probabilities of Abortion Views by Political System Attribution Category



The graph above shows the predicted probabilities that someone will support abortion based on their Political System Attribution category, with all other controls held constant at their most common category. Overall, there is a high probability that women fall into the two most supportive abortion categories. Even with the high baseline, there is clear evidence that those with the most Political System Attribution have a higher probability of being in the least restrictive category in comparison to those with the least Political

System Attribution. Someone who falls into the highest Political System Attribution category has a .43 probability of being in the least restrictive category (abortion should always be legal) compared to a probability of .31 for those who have the least amount of Political System Attribution.

The implications from this finding are that as women tie their assault to the political system, they will become more liberal in their views towards how women’s bodies should be treated. This is especially important given that abortion is such a hot-button and polarized topic. If someone has views that are strong enough towards abortion, it may be enough for them to switch political parties or doubt their own affiliation (Killian and Wilcox, 2008). Here we see something that has a clear impact on abortion views, suggesting that Political System Attribution of sexual assault could have downstream effects that cause women to think differently about important political concepts such as partisan affiliation.

ANES Sample Comparison for Political Participation

This is a comparison of the general participation of sexual assault survivors compared to the ANES 2020 (women aged 18-45). I debated comparing against the ANES 2016. However, given the important contextual factors of Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter that emerged after 2016, 2020 is most likely the best comparison point.

Table C.5: ANES Sample Comparison for Political Participation

Activity	Percentage	
	My Sample	ANES 2020
Protest	8%	14%
Wear Political Item	24%	13%
Donate Money	22%	12%
Political Argument	28%	53%
Sign a Petition	39%	35%
Post on Social	32%	43%
Contact Representative	13%	12%
Volunteer	25%	25%

Appendix D

Chapter 6 Appendix

Table D.1: Binary Indicators for Survivor/Victim/Both Identities and Policy Attitudes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion Views	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
Survivor only	-0.446** (0.189)	0.268 (0.221)	0.410** (0.183)
Victim only	0.012 (0.242)	-0.354 (0.280)	0.193 (0.234)
Both (Survivor and Victim)	-0.229 (0.175)	0.010 (0.204)	0.371** (0.168)
Political System Attribution	0.435* (0.234)	0.872*** (0.274)	0.932*** (0.233)
Black	0.196 (0.185)	-0.414** (0.209)	0.224 (0.174)
Latino	0.358 (0.249)	-0.112 (0.283)	0.062 (0.247)
Asian	0.942* (0.536)	0.391 (0.492)	0.951** (0.442)
Middle East	0.508 (1.018)	-0.387 (1.366)	-0.397 (1.146)
Two+ Races	0.008 (0.191)	-0.576*** (0.223)	0.379** (0.182)
Native American	-0.073 (0.507)	0.523 (0.570)	0.503 (0.515)
Income	0.178 (0.272)	-0.167 (0.312)	-0.242 (0.262)
Partisanship	-2.153*** (0.216)	-0.229 (0.237)	0.582*** (0.201)
No Party	-0.353 (0.228)	-0.253 (0.269)	-0.543** (0.238)
Education	0.320 (0.325)	0.591 (0.366)	-0.876*** (0.309)
Age	-0.032*** (0.009)	-0.005 (0.011)	-0.002 (0.009)
Observations	913	892	913

Note:

Note: Cutpoints not shown

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table D.2: Effect of Binary Indicators for Survivor/Victim/Both Identities on Views Towards Oppressed Groups

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Black (1)	Undoc Im (2)	Women (3)	Men (4)	White (5)
Survivor only	0.253 (0.188)	0.151 (0.183)	0.214 (0.189)	0.031 (0.178)	0.100 (0.178)
Victim only	-0.043 (0.241)	0.147 (0.238)	0.290 (0.243)	0.072 (0.231)	0.089 (0.234)
Both (Survivor and Victim)	0.269 (0.174)	0.133 (0.170)	0.352** (0.175)	-0.029 (0.164)	0.217 (0.164)
Black	1.084*** (0.196)	-0.008 (0.175)	0.701*** (0.191)	0.309* (0.175)	-0.366** (0.173)
Latino	0.442* (0.236)	0.406* (0.242)	0.505** (0.256)	0.277 (0.228)	-0.315 (0.233)
Asian	0.134 (0.450)	0.012 (0.465)	0.285 (0.480)	-0.393 (0.427)	-0.866** (0.427)
Two+ Races	0.549*** (0.191)	0.023 (0.190)	0.331* (0.190)	0.245 (0.182)	-0.327* (0.187)
Middle East	0.830 (1.297)	-1.094 (1.136)	0.748 (1.275)	-0.001 (1.220)	0.480 (0.878)
Native American	-0.369 (0.474)	0.725 (0.465)	-0.018 (0.476)	0.208 (0.457)	-0.526 (0.455)
Income	-0.251 (0.265)	-0.564** (0.264)	-0.128 (0.269)	-0.496* (0.254)	-0.080 (0.254)
Partisanship	-0.893*** (0.205)	-0.673*** (0.203)	-0.679*** (0.207)	-0.059 (0.193)	-0.067 (0.194)
No Party	-0.030 (0.214)	-0.132 (0.211)	-0.185 (0.216)	0.035 (0.208)	0.520** (0.212)
Education	0.525 (0.319)	0.557* (0.312)	0.135 (0.323)	0.003 (0.305)	0.284 (0.299)
Age	-0.030*** (0.009)	-0.039*** (0.009)	-0.015 (0.010)	0.004 (0.009)	0.014 (0.009)
Observations	913	911	913	913	913

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
 Note: Cutpoints not shown

Table D.3: Effect of Binary Indicators for Survivor/Victim/Both Identities on Women's Rights Participation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> Women's Rights Participation Scale
Survivor Only	0.542** (0.221)
Victim Only	0.580** (0.279)
Both (Survivor and Victim)	0.739*** (0.204)
PSA scaled	1.132*** (0.287)
Black	-0.471** (0.202)
Latino	-0.328 (0.288)
Asian	-0.291 (0.467)
Native	-0.986 (0.826)
Middle East	0.904 (1.165)
Two+ Races	0.728*** (0.201)
Education	1.533*** (0.357)
Income	0.212 (0.301)
Strength Rep	-0.506* (0.260)
Strength Dem	1.078*** (0.199)
No Party	-3.962*** (1.023)
Age	-0.054*** (0.011)
Observations	913
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Appendix E

Chapter 7 Appendix

Table E.1: Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Political Attitudes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
No Contact	-0.451*** (0.096)	0.001 (0.111)	0.165* (0.094)
Proximate Contact	-0.021 (0.100)	-0.122 (0.111)	0.144 (0.096)
Black	-0.085 (0.114)	0.004 (0.128)	0.086 (0.110)
Latino	-0.038 (0.147)	-0.062 (0.169)	0.399*** (0.148)
Asian	-0.164 (0.195)	-0.044 (0.220)	0.569*** (0.197)
Two+ Races	-0.058 (0.131)	-0.228 (0.153)	0.178 (0.128)
Middle East	0.424 (0.753)	0.383 (0.862)	0.137 (0.682)
Native American	-0.006 (0.390)	0.012 (0.474)	0.631 (0.404)
Income	0.185 (0.164)	-0.141 (0.186)	-0.243 (0.160)
Education	0.774*** (0.195)	0.203 (0.221)	-0.620*** (0.187)
Partisanship	-2.269*** (0.134)	-0.322** (0.145)	0.426*** (0.125)
No Party	0.047 (0.130)	-0.558*** (0.166)	-0.596*** (0.139)
Age	-0.032*** (0.006)	0.006 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.005)
Observations	2,254	2,125	2,224

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cutpoints not shown

Table E.2: Moderation Analysis Examining if The Effect of Political System Attribution on Political Attitudes is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion Views	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
No Contact	-0.262 (0.252)	-0.144 (0.318)	0.976*** (0.263)
Proximate Contact	-0.440 (0.311)	-0.066 (0.365)	0.446 (0.305)
Political System Attribution	0.392* (0.230)	0.803*** (0.261)	1.002*** (0.232)
Black	-0.095 (0.115)	0.040 (0.128)	0.089 (0.110)
Latino	-0.050 (0.148)	-0.078 (0.169)	0.403*** (0.149)
Asian	-0.170 (0.195)	-0.036 (0.220)	0.581*** (0.197)
Two+ Races	-0.058 (0.131)	-0.221 (0.154)	0.187 (0.128)
Middle East	0.524 (0.753)	0.357 (0.860)	0.206 (0.696)
Native American	0.040 (0.390)	0.043 (0.478)	0.689* (0.403)
Income	0.181 (0.164)	-0.165 (0.187)	-0.242 (0.160)
Education	0.744*** (0.196)	0.175 (0.221)	-0.645*** (0.188)
Partisanship	-2.242*** (0.135)	-0.228 (0.146)	0.475*** (0.127)
No Party	0.136 (0.136)	-0.424** (0.168)	-0.528*** (0.142)
Education	0.744*** (0.196)	0.175 (0.221)	-0.645*** (0.188)
Age	-0.032*** (0.006)	0.007 (0.006)	0.0002 (0.005)
No Contact*Political System Attribution	-0.227 (0.311)	0.224 (0.384)	-1.007*** (0.319)
Proximate Contact*Political System Attribution	0.513 (0.371)	-0.083 (0.430)	-0.369 (0.361)
Observations	2,254	2,125	2,224

Note:
Note: *Cutpoints not shown*

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table E.3: Effect of Proximate and No Contact on Women's Rights Political Participation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Women's Rights Participation Scale
No Contact	-1.272*** (0.124)
Proximate Contact	-0.339*** (0.111)
Black	-0.213 (0.133)
Latino	-0.035 (0.177)
Asian	-0.477* (0.248)
Two+ Races	0.518*** (0.148)
Middle East	1.147 (0.705)
Native American	-0.773 (0.667)
Income	0.214 (0.191)
Education	1.079*** (0.230)
Strength Democrat	1.194*** (0.138)
Strength Republican	-0.217 (0.179)
No Party	-3.839*** (0.718)
Age	-0.046*** (0.007)
Observations	2,255
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
<i>Note:</i>	<i>Cutpoints not shown</i>

Table E.4: Moderation Analysis Examining if the Effect of Political System Attribution on Political Participation is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> Women's Rights Participation Scale
No Contact	-1.295*** (0.427)
Proximate Contact	-0.138 (0.422)
Political System Attribution	1.164*** (0.282)
Black	-0.162 (0.134)
Latino	-0.036 (0.178)
Asian	-0.466* (0.249)
Two+ Races	0.537*** (0.148)
Middle East	1.116 (0.719)
Native American	-0.741 (0.670)
Income	0.227 (0.193)
Education	1.029*** (0.231)
Strength Democrat	1.155*** (0.139)
Strength Republican	-0.159 (0.180)
No Party	-3.698*** (0.719)
Age	-0.045*** (0.007)
No Contact*Political System Attribution	0.049 (0.493)
Proximate Contact*Political System Attribution	-0.271 (0.484)
Observations	2,255
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
<i>Note: Cutpoints not shown</i>	

Table E.5: Moderation Analysis Examining if The Effect of Attending Therapy on Political Attitudes is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Abortion Views	Accused Politician	Rape Sentence
Attend Therapy	-0.016 (0.019)	-0.010 (0.013)	0.003 (0.011)
No Contact	-0.085*** (0.019)	0.007 (0.013)	0.029*** (0.011)
Proximate Contact	-0.007 (0.021)	-0.011 (0.014)	0.015 (0.012)
Political System Attribution	0.067*** (0.022)	0.084*** (0.016)	0.052*** (0.013)
Black	-0.011 (0.017)	0.001 (0.012)	0.005 (0.010)
Latino	-0.004 (0.023)	-0.010 (0.016)	0.028** (0.013)
Asian	-0.016 (0.030)	-0.006 (0.020)	0.044** (0.017)
Two+ Races	0.003 (0.021)	-0.019 (0.014)	0.015 (0.012)
Middle East	0.065 (0.111)	0.028 (0.079)	0.012 (0.063)
Native American	0.017 (0.061)	0.005 (0.042)	0.044 (0.035)
Income	0.018 (0.025)	-0.016 (0.017)	-0.033** (0.014)
Education	0.109*** (0.030)	0.019 (0.021)	-0.054*** (0.017)
Partisanship	-0.357*** (0.020)	-0.023* (0.014)	0.037*** (0.011)
No PArty	0.015 (0.020)	-0.041*** (0.015)	-0.062*** (0.012)
Age	-0.005*** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.00004 (0.0005)
No Contact*Attend Therapy	0.066** (0.032)	-0.025 (0.022)	-0.036** (0.018)
Proximate Contact* Attend Therapy	0.005 (0.031)	-0.002 (0.021)	-0.0004 (0.018)
Constant	0.898*** (0.040)	0.603*** (0.028)	0.730*** (0.023)
Observations	2,254	2,125	2,224

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Note: Cutpoints not shown

Table E.6: Moderation Analysis Examining if The Effect of Attending Therapy on Views Towards Oppressed Groups is Moderated by Personal Experience, Proximate Contact or No Context with Sexual Assault

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Black	Undoc Im.	Women	Men	White
Attend Therapy	-0.024 (0.022)	-0.011 (0.022)	-0.018 (0.022)	-0.040** (0.020)	-0.033 (0.021)
No Contact	-0.053** (0.021)	-0.043** (0.022)	-0.080*** (0.022)	-0.020 (0.020)	-0.027 (0.020)
Proximate Contact	-0.035 (0.023)	-0.012 (0.023)	-0.014 (0.024)	-0.001 (0.021)	-0.013 (0.022)
Black	0.199*** (0.019)	0.008 (0.020)	0.122*** (0.020)	0.048*** (0.018)	-0.055*** (0.018)
Latino	0.052** (0.026)	0.082*** (0.026)	0.121*** (0.027)	0.050** (0.024)	-0.039 (0.024)
Asian	-0.001 (0.034)	-0.005 (0.034)	0.017 (0.035)	0.018 (0.031)	-0.030 (0.032)
Two+ Races	0.095*** (0.023)	0.016 (0.024)	0.063*** (0.024)	0.038* (0.021)	-0.031 (0.022)
Middle East	0.157 (0.124)	0.089 (0.126)	0.197 (0.128)	0.051 (0.114)	0.018 (0.118)
Native American	-0.098 (0.068)	0.056 (0.069)	-0.048 (0.070)	-0.004 (0.062)	-0.090 (0.064)
Income	-0.014 (0.028)	-0.028 (0.029)	-0.068** (0.029)	-0.005 (0.026)	0.010 (0.027)
Education	0.067** (0.034)	0.074** (0.034)	0.044 (0.035)	-0.017 (0.031)	-0.010 (0.032)
Partisanship	-0.164*** (0.022)	-0.120*** (0.023)	-0.131*** (0.023)	0.019 (0.021)	0.004 (0.021)
No Party	0.001 (0.023)	-0.009 (0.023)	-0.010 (0.023)	0.058*** (0.021)	0.074*** (0.021)
Age	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)
No Contact*Attend Therapy	0.016 (0.035)	-0.012 (0.036)	-0.032 (0.036)	0.018 (0.033)	0.029 (0.034)
Proximate Contact*Attend Therapy	0.055 (0.035)	0.003 (0.035)	-0.022 (0.036)	0.011 (0.032)	0.004 (0.033)
Constant	0.711*** (0.040)	0.724*** (0.040)	0.730*** (0.041)	0.476*** (0.037)	0.449*** (0.038)
Observations	2,241	2,239	2,240	2,242	2,240

Note:
Note: *Cutpoints not shown*

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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