

Flying under the radar: Gender, violence and grade point average

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Abstract

Sexual assaults continue to be a prevalent issue on college campuses. Research has shown that being sexually assaulted is associated with adverse outcomes in college students' grade point average (GPA). However, self-reported history of sexual violence perpetration and its associations with GPA has not been studied at the college level. A history of sexual violence as either perpetrator or victim has not been extensively explored, particularly in individuals at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Questionnaire data were collected on 2068 students attending an HBCU who self-identified as men and women on various demographic and academic outcomes. The experience of sexual violence (perpetrator or victim) in the past year, age, and self-identified gender were evaluated as predictors of GPA. Results indicated that women and older individuals had higher GPAs ($p < 0.001$), and these factors accounted for about 1% of the variance in GPA. In comparison, the addition of being a perpetrator of sexual violence augmented the variance and

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accounted for 2.3% ($p < 0.001$). These effects are small but significant predictors and open a new line of research into the traits of those who commit sexual assault on college campuses.

Keywords: Sexual assault; Grade point average; Age; Gender

1. Introduction

The prevalence of being a victim of sexual assault is surging for young adults in college. In the United States, every 68 seconds, a person is a victim of sexual assault (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). As of 2020, 13% of all college students have reported experiencing sexual assault victimization (Cantor et al., 2020). It has been shown that there is a negative impact of sexual assault victimization on one's academic performance in college (Mengo & Black, 2016). At the same time, the impact of academic performance on the individuals who perpetuate sexual assault is less examined. This study examined how age, gender, experiencing sexual assault victimization, and perpetrating sexual assault can predict academic performance measured by grade point average (GPA) in Black college students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sexual Assault Victimization and GPA

Sexual assault can be characterized as forcible rape, statutory rape, unwanted touching, forceful grabbing, and any unwanted sexual contact meant to harass and disempower the victim while bringing gratification to the perpetrator (McLeod, 2011). There is a common misconception that only women experience sexual assault victimization. Both men and women experience sexual assaults on college campuses; however, most of these experiences go underreported. It is estimated that only 1 in 10 sexual assaults that occur on college campuses are reported (Fisher et al., 2000). The experience of sexual assault victimization decreases GPA and increases the possibility of a student withdrawing from their institution by 29% (Mengo & Black, 2016).

There are more barriers to success in college achievement for Black students who experience sexual assault victimization. They report higher rates of exposure to traumatic events and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in comparison to non-black students who have experienced sexual assaults (Boyras et al., 2013; Payne et al., 2014). The experience of traumatic events for Black young adults is associated with more psychological pathology and feelings of shame, betrayal, and helplessness (Payne et al., 2014). They also experience changes in their behavior; they are more likely to isolate themselves and become hyper-vigilant about protecting their dignity and self-respect, which can be displayed through them speaking less about their emotions and becoming more verbal about their somatic issues (Franklin, 2008; Payne, 2012). For example, a Black student who has experienced sexual assault victimization may withdraw from class discussions and decrease the number of assignments they turn in. They may also feel more aches and pains from the stress of the sexual assault, which somaticized into pain. They would be less likely to say they feel depressed or anxious and more likely to say, "I'm tired," express having a headache or their stomach hurting.

Alongside race, gender also influences how sexual assault victimization impacts one's GPA. One in four women in college report being sexually assaulted on college campuses (Cantor et al., 2017; Krebs et al., 2009). The experience of sexual assault victimization not only negatively impacts GPA but also has impacts on their economic progress (Potter et al., 2022). On the other hand, being in college makes men 78% more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than men not enrolled in college, with over 6.8% of undergraduate men reporting being a victim of sexual assault (Cantor et al., 2020; Sinozich & Langton, 2014). However, it is difficult to obtain accurate sexual assault victimization prevalence rates for men because they are less likely than women to disclose being sexually assaulted (Schraufnagel et al., 2010). Low disclosure rates in men could account for the difference in reported rates of sexual assault victimization between men and women (Sutherland et al., 2014; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

The intersection of race and gender causes a multiplicative effect from stress, which is known as intersectionality. Intersectionality is the term created by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to illustrate how black women's intersection of identity's shape's structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color (Crenshaw, 1990). In her analysis, she explores the representation of women of color in popular culture and focuses on how black women are ignored and severely negatively impacted by violence against them. Not only do they face external pressures, but they also bear the weight of not being recognized as one of their identities because of the other.

The experience of sexual assault victimization on Black women in college has more nuanced effects on their academics. They are less likely to report a decrease in their GPA following the experience of sexual assault victimization than non-Black women (Potter et al., 2022). The decreased impact of sexual assault on GPAs could be attributed to their experiences of daily stressors and the resilience they gain from enduring multiple stressors at once because of their intersectionality. The weight of Black women's intersectionality can lead to their decreased likelihood of reporting sexual assault victimization. It would stand to reason that racial stressors would influence how sexual assault victimization affects Black men's GPA.

It is believed that sexual assault victimization is more detrimental to Black Women than Black men (Boyras et al., 2013). Black men are less likely to verbally acknowledge their daily struggles than others (Payne et al., 2014). Their socialization suggests that masculinity calls for them to refrain from vulnerability, which causes them to isolate themselves, suffer in silence, and blame themselves for being sexually assaulted. The influence of masculinity and homophobia can make Black men fear their sexual orientation being called into question (Sable et al., 2006). Therefore, when they experience sexual assault, they seek out ways to suppress their emotions, such as abusing drugs and alcohol. This tendency to deny their struggles leads them to have different reactions to traumatic events such as sexual assault victimization, which could contribute to the belief that sexual assault victimization is more prevalent among Black women.

2.2. Perpetrators of Sexual assault and GPA

While the literature on the impacts of sexual assault victimization and academic performance has been well documented, there has not been a thorough analysis of the academic performance of Black college students who commit sexual assault. It is known that individuals who commit sexual assault have lower academic performance in primary school. Many individuals who perpetrate sexual assaults often begin doing so in adolescence (Blaske et al., 1989). Adolescence is a crucial phase of human development, where people establish their behavioral patterns around sexual activity and decision-making between the ages of 10 and 19 (Elder & Shanahan, 2007). Often, individuals who perpetrate sexual assault during adolescence have poorer academic performance and significantly more cognitive impairment than adolescents who do not (Joyal et al., 2014; Ronis & Bordin, 2007). They also tend to display more anxiety, ruminating, and paranoid thinking, which can contribute to challenges with sustaining peer relationships and isolation from others (Blaske et al., 1989; Jespersen et al., 2009). The act of perpetuating sexual assault during adolescence is related to one's beliefs and perceptions around the morality of committing sexual assault. Those adolescents are more likely to approve of others using coercion to have sexual intercourse (Abbey et al., 2001).

Gender and gender roles relate to whether a person perpetrates sexual assault. The characteristics of those who commit sexual assaults vary between men and women. Men who perpetrate sexual assault are more likely to abide by aspects of oppressive masculinity that lead to intolerant beliefs such as sexism, homophobia, and classism (Abbey et al., 2001; Aosved & Long, 2006). These characteristics are related to an insatiable need for power over others and alcohol consumption (Abbey et al., 2001). In many reported sexual assaults, alcohol consumption from both parties was a factor. When under the influence of alcohol, men tend to be more coercive (Abbey et al., 2001).

Much less research has been conducted on the characteristics of female sexual assault perpetration. There are limited amounts of research that explore women as perpetrators of sexual violence. There is a prevalent belief that women cannot sexually assault men, which has been codified into law through rape statutes in over a quarter of the states in the US by having gender restrictions on what acts are classified as rape (Levine, 2018). Furthermore, this belief is evident in the literature on women as sexual violence perpetrators, as much of it focuses on those who sexually abuse children (Sutherland et al., 2014). However, a study on sexual assault victimization and perpetration in college-enrolled men and women found that more women reported being perpetrators of sexual assault than men (Sutherland et al., 2014). Women who commit sexual assaults against others are more likely to be more sexually compulsive and coercive to have sexual encounters with unwilling individuals that can range from nonpenetrative acts to penetrative acts (Schatzel-Murphey et al., 2009).

Individuals who have experienced trauma in any form tend to inflict the same form of trauma they experienced. Of those who experience and inflict assaults on others, those who commit sexual assaults are significantly more likely to have been victims of sexual assault (Jespersen et al., 2009). This experience is present across gender identity, as men and women have reported being perpetrators and victims of sexual violence (Sutherland et al., 2014). Those who have been both are more likely to have increased sexual compulsiveness and hypersexuality (Jespersen et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2014). It should also be noted that not all sexual assault perpetrators have experienced sexual assault victimization (Jespersen et al., 2009).

2.3. HBCUs, GPA, and Sexual Assaults

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are essential in the achievement of Black people in the United States. They serve as safe places for Black youth seeking economic advancement. However, they are not free from incidents of sexual assault perpetration, as almost one in ten Black Women who attend HBCUs have reported experiencing sexual assault since coming to college (Krebs et al., 2011). HBCUs are and will continue to be necessary to dismantle structural barriers that interfere with educational attainment due to systemic racism. Systemic racism refers to racial inequality throughout all sectors of life, and it is ingrained within laws, policies, state and federal programs, values, cultural norms, and opportunities for advancement (Banaji et al., 2021). Experiences of structural racism in higher education can include limited access to resources, underfunded schools, and diminished access to professional networks (Hudson et al., 2016).

HBCUs were created to address inequities in the education system due to systemic racism. They foster a nurturing community where Black people can gain valuable academic skills and professional development (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Mobley & Hall, 2020; Shorette & Palmer, 2015). One of the ways this was done is by creating a culturally affirming space where students do not have to worry about racial tensions and discrimination because they are the racial majority at HBCUs (Hamilton et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2012). Therefore, removing the minority experience present in many higher education institutions allows them a fair chance to succeed by equipping them with the tools to manage incidents of discrimination (Hamilton et al., 2015).

HBCUs produce the highest number of Black college graduates in the United States (Cokley, 2000). They prepare their graduates for competitive roles in corporate, government, research, and academic sectors that pay a living wage (Cokley, 2000; Knight et al., 2012). Graduates of HBCUs are more likely to have higher GPAs than Black students attending other institutions (Strayhorn, 2008; Cokley, 2000). Black students who have a higher GPA are more likely to have a higher income than Black students with lower GPAs. The effect of the difference between high and low GPAs on income in Black students is much stronger than having a high versus a low GPA in White students (Pascarella & Smart, 1990; Strayhorn, 2008). Without the support that Black students receive from HBCUs, the broad utilization of GPA in hiring practices would cause Black individuals with lower GPAs to be screened out of the hiring process at higher rates than White applicants (Roth & Bobko, 2000).

2.4. Grade Point Average

University systems utilize the Grade Point Average system to measure student academic performance, skill, and achievement. It is calculated by converting letter grades to a value between 0 and four, with 4 representing an "A" and 0 representing an "F" (McCabe, 2024). Literature has shown that one's GPA is correlated with mental agility, conscientiousness, and motivation to thrive in an academic setting (Roth & Bobko, 2000). Not only are minimum GPA requirements set for admission into graduate school, internships, and early career employment, but it is also utilized in decision-making around scholarships, grants, and maintaining financial aid (McCabe, 2024). All of these are important to persist through college and are crucial factors in determining the economic status of Black young adults (Keels, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008). High GPAs in college graduates are essential to companies as they demonstrate that the applicant is hardworking and motivated, two of the most important skills employers seek when hiring (McCabe, 2024; Roth & Bobko, 2000).

One's GPA can be influenced by demographic factors such as age, race, and gender. Students 21 years and older have higher final cumulative GPAs than younger students when in undergraduate school (Sheard, 2009). This phenomenon can be attributed to one's life experience, as one may see education as a chance to change one's economic circumstances. Many older students have already adjusted to college and living independently, so they have better time management skills and can advocate for themselves better than younger students who are new to college. On the other hand, being over 21 and identifying as a woman are associated with better academic performance (Sheard, 2009).

On average, women tend to have higher GPAs than men (Sheard, 2009; Thiele et al., 2016). There is a wide gap in GPA between Black men and women, which grows when accounting for differences in socioeconomic factors (Keels, 2013). Despite the increased disadvantages endured by Black women because of their intersectionality, they have higher GPAs than Black men (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Keels, 2013). Black women can better navigate the collegiate experience when they have supportive relationships that affirm their identity as Black women (Porter & Byrd, 2021). Those who are affirmed in themselves can regulate their emotions effectively.

Meanwhile, Black men are more likely to be affected by negative stereotypes associated with academic achievement, such as being accepted into college due to affirmative action, being an athlete, and questions of their masculinity. Black men are prone to distancing themselves from education as it is often associated with whiteness and femininity (Palmer,

2015). Their persistent exposure to daily acts of racism also inhibits their ability to ask for assistance. It contributes to hypermasculinity, which increases barriers to the skills needed to succeed in higher education, such as help-seeking (Powell et al., 2016). Although HBCUs remove that daily minority experience, the Black men who attend them are also reluctant to ask for help when having challenges in their academic studies (Palmer, 2015). Their internalization of these stereotypes adversely affects their ability to persist through college (Massey & Fischer, 2005). Race, age, and gender strongly correlate with academic performance in college (Keels, 2013; Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1993), and these are critical to social, psychological, and economic prosperity achieved through degree attainment (Keels, 2013). The current study will examine whether sociodemographic factors of age, gender, and the experience of sexual violence perpetration or victimization predict GPA in Black HBCU students.

2.5. Research Questions

Are there relationships between age, gender, being a victim of sexual assault, being a perpetrator of sexual assault, and GPA in HBCU college students?

Does age, gender, being a victim of sexual assault, and being a perpetrator of sexual assault predict grade point average in college students at HBCUs? In what direction does each variable predict grade point average?

2.5.1. Hypotheses

We hypothesize that there would be a statistically significant positive relationship between age and GPA indicating that as age increases, grade point average increases. There would also be a statistically significant effect if gender on grade point average, with women having higher GPAs in comparison to men. We hypothesized that there would be a statistically significant negative relationship between identity as a victim as well as a perpetrator of sexual assault and GPA. We lastly hypothesized that age, gender, sexual assault victimization, and sexual assault perpetration would be accurate predictors of lower grade point averages. Whereas being older and a woman will contribute positively to their GPA, and being a victim and a perpetrator of sexual assault will contribute negatively to GPA.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Study Design

The current study used archival data from a study on drug use, alcohol use, and adverse health behavior in Black undergraduate students in the southeastern United States. The primary study was cross-sectional in nature, surveying students at every undergraduate classification, from first years to seniors (Edwards et al., 2015). The current study included 2068 of the larger sample from 8 out of 11 HBCUs invited to enroll from the southeastern US to evaluate whether sexual violence perpetration, sexual violence victimization, gender, and age predict grade point average.

3.2. Subjects

Responses from a sample of 2068 students were analyzed for this study. Most of the sample identified as women ($n = 1348$, 65.2%), and thirty-five percent identified as men ($n = 720$). The undergraduate students ranged widely in age (range 18- 53, $\bar{x} = 20.3$, $sd = 3.74$) (Edwards et al., 2015). A subset ($n = 564$) responded to the question about having been taken sexual advantage of in the past year and gender; 201 self-identified as men and 363 self-identified as women. A subset of 564 participants responded to the question of having taken sexual advantage of someone else in the past year and gender, with 200 self-identified as men and 364 self-identified as women.

3.3. Materials

The Core Alcohol and Drug Survey is commonly utilized to evaluate attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs that college students have about alcohol and drugs. It also examines the consequences of college students' alcohol and drug use. The current study analyzed questions around sexual activities of "have been taken advantage of sexually" and "have taken advantage of someone else" within the last year, either on or near their campus. Participants responses ranged from "Never" to "10 or more times." The results from the demographic survey were utilized to determine participants' age, gender, and GPA. Participants had the option to identify as either male or female and could enter their two-digit age. GPA was reported as their approximate cumulative grade point average. Participants were asked to select their letter grade from A+ to F.

3.4. Procedures

Participants were recruited individually and in groups into the current IRB approved study utilizing convenience sampling by offering opportunities for students to participate in on-campus events. Participants were tested in groups of 15 to 35 participants and did not receive incentives for participating in the study. The study was explained to participants by campus counseling officials, who allowed them to ask questions and complete surveys after participants provided informed consent. (Edwards et al., 2015).

4. Results

4.1. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics Windows, version 23 (IBM Corp., 2015). Pearson correlations were run to evaluate the relationship between age, gender, sexual assault victimization, and sexual assault perpetration. Multiple regressions were run to determine which variables were predictors of GPA and to what extent each equation accounted for the variance in GPA scores. While running the multiple regressions, ANOVA determined if adding a variable caused a significant change to the regression equation. The initial multiple regression was run to examine whether age and gender predict GPA. The second multiple regression analysis was run to examine whether age, gender, and sexual assault victimization predict GPA. Lastly, the third multiple regression analysis evaluated if adding sexual assault perpetration would predict GPA.

On average, participants had a 2.87 GPA (sd = 0.70). Age had a positive association with GPA, suggesting that older participants were more likely to have higher GPAs ($r(2066) = 0.09, p = 0.0001$). There was an inverse relationship between GPA and victimization, suggesting that having a lower GPA was associated with experiencing sexual assault victimization ($r(2066) = -0.04, p = 0.03$). There was also an inverse relationship between GPA and perpetration, which suggested that have a lower GPA was associated with committing sexual assault in the past year ($r(2066) = -0.09, p = 0.0001$). A positive relationship between GPA and gender was found suggesting that suggesting that being a woman was associated with having higher GPAs ($r(2066) = 0.09, p = 0.0001$). Gender has a negative relationship with age, suggesting that being a woman was associated with being younger ($r(2066) = -0.05, p = 0.02$). Gender also has a negative association with victimization, suggesting that being a man is associated with experiencing sexual assault victimization ($r(2066) = -0.07, p = 0.03$). There was an inverse relationship between gender and sexual assault perpetration, suggesting that being a man is associated with perpetrating sexual assault ($r(2066) = -0.08, p < 0.0001$). No significant relationships were found between age and victimization ($r(2066) = 0.02, p > 0.05$), or age and perpetration ($r(2066) = 0.02, p > 0.05$). There was a positive relationship between having been sexually assaulted and having sexually assaulting someone else, suggesting that there is an association between having been a victim of sexual assault and committing sexual assault ($r(2066) = .45, p < 0.000$) (Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for GPA, Gender, Age, Victimization, Perpetration

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. GPA	-				
2. Gender	0.09***	-			
3. Age	0.09***	-0.05*	-		
4. Victimization	-0.04***	-0.07***	-0.02	-	
5. Perpetration	-0.09***	-0.08***	-0.02	0.45***	-

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

As shown in Figure 1, the subset who responded to the question have been taken sexually advantage of in the past year and gender, it was found that 532 participants (187 men, 345 women) responded that they did not experience being taken advantage of sexually. However, 32 participants (14 men and 18 women) did report experiencing being taken advantage of sexually at least once in the past year. Chi-Square analysis showed that participants who responded to the question on being taken sexually advantage of in the past year did not differ by gender, $\chi^2(5, N = 546) = 2.98, p > 0.05$.

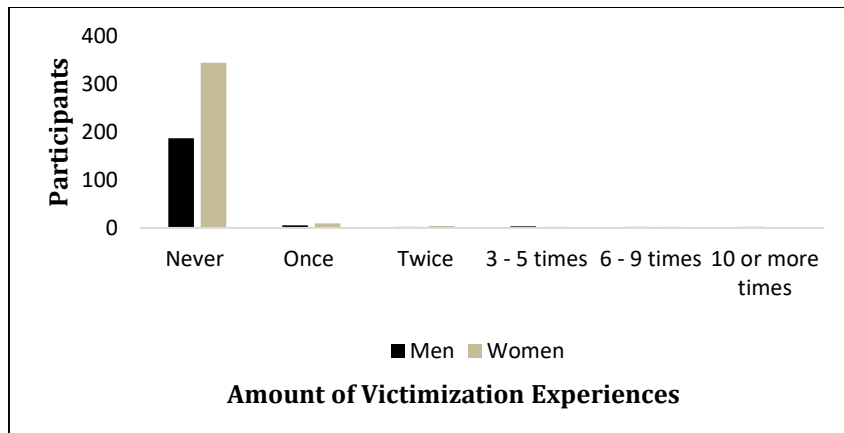


Figure 1 Responses to Sexual Assault Victimization Experience

Out of the 564 participants who responded to the question about "having taken sexual advantage of someone else in the past year and gender, 539 participants (185 men, 354 women) responded never to the question Have taken sexual advantage of someone else. It was found that 25 participants (15 Men and 10 Women) responded that they had taken sexual advantage of someone else one or more times in the past year. Chi-Square analysis showed that there was no association between one's gender and responding to the item have taken sexually advantage of someone else $\chi^2 (5, N = 545) = 9.43, p = 0.10$ (Figure 2).

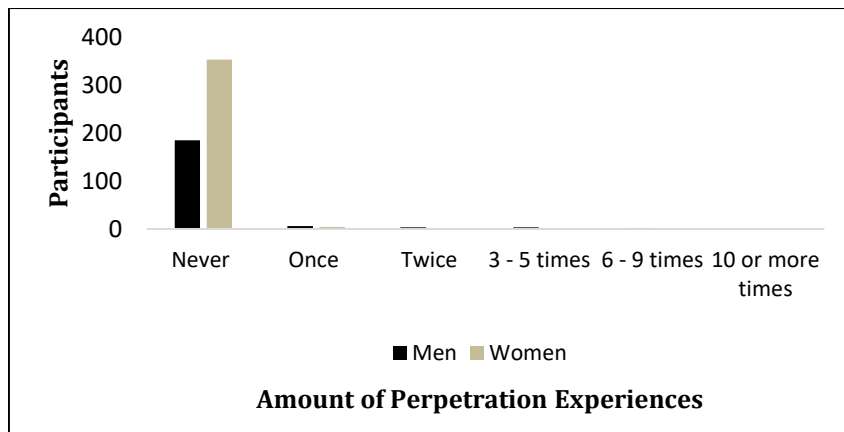


Figure 2 Responses to Experiences of Sexual Assault Perpetration

Table 2 Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis with Gender and Age

Variable	Model 1		
	B	SE (B)	β
Gender	0.14	0.03	0.096***
Age	0.02	0.00	0.089***
R ²		0.016	
F change		17.16***	
<i>Note.</i> * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.			

In examining if age and gender predict grade point average in college students at HBCUs, it was found that age and gender account for 1.6% of the variance in GPA can be accounted for by the predictors of age and gender collectively (r^2

= 0.016, $F(2, 2065) = 17.160, p < 0.001$). Evaluating the unique individual contributions of the predictors shows that age ($\beta = .096, t = 4.393, p < .000$) positively predicts GPA, and women are more likely to report a higher GPA ($\beta = 0.089, t = 4.069, p < 0.000$) (Table 2).

When examining if age, gender, being a victim of sexual assault, and being a perpetrator of sexual assault predict grade point average in college students at HBCUs, it was found that being a victim of sexual assault account in addition to the predictors of age and gender accounted for 1.7% of the variance in GPA ($R^2 = 0.017, F(1, 2064) = 2.339, p = 0.126$). However, when looking at the individual contributions of age ($\beta = 0.094, t = 4.281, p < 0.000$), being a woman ($\beta = 0.088, t = 4.040, p < 0.000$), having been taken advantage of did not contribute significantly as a predictor of GPA to the regression equation with age and gender only ($\beta = -0.033, t = -1.530, p = 0.126$) (Table 3).

Table 3 Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Addition of Victimization

	Model 2		
Variable	B	SE (B)	β
Gender	0.14	0.03	0.09***
Age	0.02	0.00	0.09***
Victimization	-0.04	0.03	-0.03
R ²		0.017	
F change		2.34	
<i>Note. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.</i>			

Lastly, it was found that 2.3% of the variance in GPA can be accounted for by the predictors of age, gender, being a victim of sexual assault, and being a perpetrator of sexual assault ($r^2 = 0.023, F(1, 2063) = 11.15, p = 0.001$). Looking at the unique contribution of each variable, age ($\beta = 0.090, t = 4.092, p < 0.000$) and being a woman ($\beta = 0.087, t = 3.991, p < 0.000$) continue to predict GPA positively. In this model, having been sexually assaulted in the past year did not contribute significantly to the regression equation ($\beta = 0.003, t = 0.131, p = 0.896$). The additional variable showed that having sexually assaulted someone in the past year negatively predicts GPA ($\beta = -0.082, t = -3.339, p = 0.001$). For every additional person the participant has sexually assaulted in the past year, the model predicts that the GPA will decrease by 0.122 points when holding age, gender, and having been taken sexual advantage of (Table 4).

Table 4 Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis with Addition of Perpetration

	Model 3		
Variable	B	SE (B)	β
Gender	0.13	0.03	0.090***
Age	0.02	0.00	0.09***
Victimization	0.00	0.03	0.003
Perpetration	-0.12	0.04	-0.08***
R ²		0.023	
F change		11.15***	
<i>Note. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.</i>			

5. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to determine whether being a victim of sexual assault in the past year, being a perpetrator of sexual assault in the past year, age, and gender predict grade point average in Black college students at HBCUs. Although it was found that experiencing sexual assault in the past year did not contribute significantly to the GPA, we

believe that having perpetrated sexual assault on someone else contributes significantly to GPA. Committing sexual assault in the past year appears to be associated with decreased academic performance.

The connection between committing SA and academic achievement could be attributed to the ability to maintain self-discipline. A compromised frontal lobe and difficulties with inhibition may manifest in poor grades and an inability to control basic biological urges. The discipline to keep track of assignments, manage time, and study for tests may represent the same internal controls needed to suppress sexual urges. It would also stand to reason that self-discipline is necessary in interpersonal relationships. For example, when one has the urge to do something sexual with a peer and makes a sexual advance but does not receive consent to the encounter, and one elevates to the sexual act, they have effectively committed sexual assault.

It could also be suggested that they may be unable to regulate their emotions. For instance, when one has their sexual advances denied, one may feel upset, and without the ability to regulate their emotions, they could end up ignoring the denial. This inability can also be shown in the classroom. Failing an assignment can lead to feelings of disappointment. If one cannot regulate their emotions, they may outburst in class and react impulsively by approaching their professor in a hostile manner. Not only can issues with emotional regulation show up after failing an assignment, but it can also be the outcome of a negative interaction with a professor. Students' reactions could be characterized by not attending class and missing assignments, which could cause them to fail the course, decreasing their GPAs.

5.1. Future directions

Psychologists and radiologists should collaborate to see if perpetrators of sexual assault have a different frontal lobe functioning than nonsexual offenders. It may be the case that perpetrators have differences on the Wisconsin Card sorting test, which measures the ability to move rapidly from inhibition to initiation (Barceló et al., 2008). Perpetrators may be the same as everyone else except for the fact that they have a frontal lobe that does not allow them to inhibit their biological urges. Poor grades may be a way to identify those individuals early and provide them assistance through training and early intervention.

Future research is needed to detangle the complicated relationship between brain structure, neurological function, and behavior. This includes how early cerebral damage during critical developmental phases impacts brain functioning and under what circumstances those changes are translated into maladaptive behaviors. We further believe that the critical input of psychologists, experts in behavior, is essential for guiding research in this area.

We also understand that not every structural change is associated with a behavior change. The role of individual differences, individual experiences, and genetic variation contributes not only to normality but also collectively defines what we believe to be maladaptive as a society. Understanding individual differences and the process by which individuals conform to societal standards remains complex, not well-understood, and understudied—magnified by proportions of diversity to include gender, race, and other factors. We must pursue studies that give insight into how we conform and meet societal standards as well as how and why we do not. Social deviation and non-conformity are not always pathology, and it's how we grow and mature as a society. The complicated movement of our culture from its infancy, where diversity was seen as negative, to our adolescence, where we believe diversity was important and remains an important area of sociological, cultural, and psychological explorations. This suggests that we need more Black, Latino, and other clinicians and researchers from historically disenfranchised communities to lead, manage, and interpret data from such studies in an ecologically valid measure. We viewed today's study as an important first step in understanding individual variation in the complicated relationship of grades to sexual assault. More is needed, and more is required to validate the experiences of those who do not live in the land of the majority.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has illuminated a significant aspect of the relationship between sexual assault, self-discipline, and academic performance among Black college students attending an HBCU. While the experience of being a victim of sexual assault did not show a significant impact on GPA, the perpetration of sexual assault was notably associated with decreased academic performance. This connection suggests that engaging in sexual violence may reflect broader difficulties with self-discipline and emotional regulation, which could adversely affect academic achievement. The observed link between the perpetration of sexual assault and lower GPA underscores the potential role of impaired frontal lobe function and difficulties with emotional control in academic settings. Overall, while this study represents an important step in exploring the complex relationship between sexual assault and academic performance, continued research is necessary. Deepening our understanding of these issues is crucial to fostering better support systems and interventions for students affected by these challenges, thereby contributing to their academic and personal success.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicting financial interests or personal relationships that may have influenced the work disclosed in this study.

Statement of ethical approval

The present research work utilizes archival data and ethical approval was given under the Institutional Review board and given clearance.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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