

**TOWSON UNIVERSITY
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**BILL COSBY AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MEDIA:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONVERSATION OF RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT
IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

by

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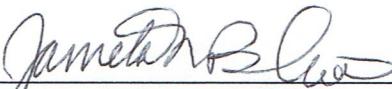
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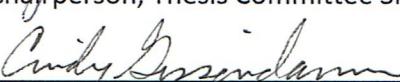
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Abstract

Bill Cosby is regarded as one of the most impactful figures within the African American community, which made the numerous sexual assault allegations raised against him contentious within and outside of the African American community. The media is a primary source of information, and more recently, online media has dominated print media as the number one source for information. In recognition of the Bill Cosby scandal, this study utilized grounded theory to analyze and develop themes around platforms within the African American online media, specifically the online platforms of Ebony and Essence magazines, as they are among the most recognized magazines within that community. Grounded theory was used to examine how the African American community responded to the allegations raised against Bill Cosby, in order to understand how rape and sexual assault are framed and discussed within that community. Several themes developed, leading to the emergence of the Fractured Conversation Model (FCM). FCM includes a discussion of rape and sexual assault and engagement of race, class, and gender dynamics, but also includes utilization of victim blaming and perpetuation of rape culture.

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Introduction

Media, Rape, and Sexual Assault

The media is understood to be a primary source of information, one that reflects society's outlook, and therefore promotes hegemonic theories and beliefs (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2013; Mastro, Blecha, & Seate, 2011). As the primary source of information, the media plays a significant role in generating information, and specifically affects how the audience receives its content. The way the material is delivered shapes how the conversation around the topic takes place, along with who the audience supports or rejects in any given situation. In doing so, the media constructs conversations around topics and affects how the audience rallies and distributes resources to those affected. When scandalous events occur, the media becomes a heightened space for information and guidance. Audiences focus in with an expectation of information, and larger conversational pieces form based on the given material.

The media, therefore, acts as a gateway for information to the public and has particularly become more accessible through the Internet and various technological platforms. Through this, stories, or more often, scandals, are quickly and widely spread with spaces for the public to respond and comment on any given topic. Online media has noticeably changed how information is received, particularly with the reliance on websites, blogs, and social media platforms, which allow for faster dissemination of information. Researchers have identified the effect that social media has on communication, particularly noting how it has transformed how journalists and readers share and receive such information (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). When stories appear on the Internet, the ability to send them from one social media platform to the next and share with family and friends creates a heightened focus, particularly when the news involves

celebrities. Therefore, the media has more access to delivering information and a more widespread audience through these platforms.

In realization of the media's effect, researchers have extensively studied media and how it frames conversations about rape and sexual assault. In doing so, the framing theory has been used to understand how the world is perceived and to gauge which topics are deemed important and relevant by the media. Volkmer (2009) defined the framing theory to capture specific frames used by the media and to recognize how the media may be biased in its selection of the side of the story it chooses to cover. Framing theory allows for an understanding of the dominant perspective held with subjects. Rape and sexual assault can be contentious issues due to the rape culture, which leads to victim blaming and denial when cases are presented. The framing theory can clarify how rape and sexual assault are perceived and how the conversation around the topic is framed.

Hollander and Rodgers (2014) grounded their work in framing theory while assessing how the media portrayed women's resistance to sexual assault. The researchers found a lack of depiction of women's resistance or self-defense in a sample of newspaper articles. Hollander and Rodgers expanded their research to establish a broader understanding of the importance of how rape and sexual assault are framed within the media. The researchers stated that the portrayal had implications on how women viewed their ability to fight back if they were assaulted. Along with this, such media presentations depicted women as pliable victims for potential attackers, which could have led to sexual assault being unintentionally encouraged. This study can be understood as an example of the importance of understanding how rape and sexual assault are framed within the media.

In recent years, there has been a shift by the media to deliver information online. Although print work exists through newspapers and magazines, the Internet has become the dominant source to view and receive information. Rosensteil, Mitchell, Purcell, and Rainie (2011) found that the Internet surpassed newspapers as a source for information, particularly for individuals who were under 40 years old. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr, are considered the most popular, along with various forms of blogs and websites. The existence of such platforms has opened the discussion of rape and sexual assault to allow for voices outside of professional journalists.

While comparing the differences between how newspapers and blogs framed the 2013 Steubenville rape case where a high school girl was repeatedly raped and sexually assaulted by two of her peers with several others recording and documenting the assault, Moody-Ramirez, Lewis, and Murray (2015) found that, while newspapers were split between their positive and negative framing of the football players, blogs were more likely to frame them negatively and extended the rape case into a discussion of rape culture. The researchers stated that, while journalists were expected to remain objective when reporting the case, bloggers were allowed more freedom to include their personal opinions. Therefore, the researchers theorized that those expectations could have led to the difference in how the information was framed. Blogs were more likely to include personal opinions and feelings in response to such rape cases, which allowed bloggers the freedom to question the football players and minimize the victim blaming. The researchers ultimately highlighted the tendency of the media to blame the victim while delivering news stories. In turn, the public's access to online platforms allowed challenging the narratives created by the media.

Harp, Loke, and Bachmann (2014) further analyzed the differences in how journalists and online blogs covered rape and sexual assault. The researchers focused on how bloggers responded to the attack on Lara Logan, searching for feminist viewpoints within the way in which the stories were framed. Lara Logan was a *CBS News* chief foreign affairs correspondent, who was sexually assaulted during her coverage of the events after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's forced resignation (Harp et al., 2014). The researchers found that typical rape myths surfaced with the discussion of Logan's looks, the questions regarding placing herself in such a dangerous environment, and the conversation focusing on race and violence within Islam. The researchers also found that, while the discussion was framed with rape myths, the existence of blogs allowed varied perspectives and counterarguments to the myths that were proposed. Rape myths are characterized as false, generalized beliefs that are used to discount claims of rape and sexual assault. Examples of such myths include the victim deserving it, focusing on the behavior of the victim, and making attempts to identify what they did wrong (Franiuk, Seefelt, and Vandello, 2008). Researchers have identified that the media use rape myths when discussing stories regarding rape and sexual assault.

The power and associated level of fame of the alleged assailant also affects how cases are presented in articles that discuss rape and sexual assault. McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) found that, with cases of sexual harassment where a high-profile male is accused, the media often framed the discussion as an individual issue, disregarding the larger systemic problem based in gender inequality. Along with this, rape myths were identified in articles related to celebrity figures. For example, when assessing rape myths in relation to the Kobe Bryant case, researchers found that myths were used in the titles and the content of the articles. Out of 156 articles researched, 65 featured at least one rape myth. The most popular myth found by the

researchers stated that the victim lied about the rape. Along with this, comments were made regarding Bryant's status and skills as an athlete, and positive comments focused on Bryant's clean image in the media. Ultimately, there were more positive comments about Bryant as an individual, whereas there were negative statements found regarding the alleged victim and her character (Franiuk et al., 2008). While there were positive comments, Bryant's position as a Black man also affected how the media handled the conversation.

Intersectionality, Rape, and Sexual Assault

Discussion about rape and sexual assault becomes more complicated when race is included in the conversation. According to Freedman (2011), Black men have often been the target of rape accusations and depicted as violent and out of control rapists, particularly during the slavery and abolition eras. On the other hand, White women were noted as pure individuals to be protected, and Black women were often depicted as promiscuous (Freedman, 2011). Researchers have analyzed this racialization of rape and sexual assault. In doing so, the researchers have focused on how the media shapes the conversation about rape and sexual assault, particularly when race can be factored into such acts of violence. Jackson (2013) assessed the media's response to the kidnapping, assault, and rape of Megan Williams. Megan Williams was a Black woman who was assaulted and raped by six White men. Jackson found that, not only did the story not receive major coverage; it was also covered by primarily White male sources, which affected how the coverage was framed. The coverage was often split between news media, such as CNN, which failed to identify the underlying racism that was associated with the rape, and Fox News, which entirely ignored the racist and sexist behavior of the rapists.

Along with this, Worthington (2013) conducted an intersectional analysis of the coverage of the gang rape of a high school student by up to 11 men, which included men of color. The researcher found that racist discourse was present when the races of the assailants were identified. When the races of the assailants were revealed in these articles, men of color, specifically, were highlighted and likened to animals. Furthermore, the researcher found a connection between the media's racialization of the crime, and its labeling of the lower income neighborhood as a rough town, therefore additionally engaging in classism. In framing the town in this manner, the media focused on an expectation of behavior such as rape in the community and the large population of minorities who inhabit it, which took away from the opportunity to expand the discussion of rape into a societal issue. Another study identified that, when comparing how newspapers depicted Black and White athletes, Black athletes were more commonly depicted as criminals with their crimes explained in more detail than their White counterparts (Mastro et al., 2011). Adding all the topics together, Knight et al. (2001) found that people were influenced by the fame, status, and race of individuals who are accused of rape.

Exploring Rape and Sexual Assault Through Bill Cosby

In October of 2014, comedian Hannibal Buress identified Bill Cosby as a rapist amid a joke about Cosby. The performance was recorded and placed on YouTube and shortly after, the video went viral. Although there were previous reports and accusations of rape and sexual assault against Cosby dating back to November 2002, where, according to Giles and Jones (2015), Andrea Constand accused him of sexual assault, it was only after the video was released and became viral that the media appropriately highlighted the stories, which reinforces the role of the media and social action as a platform for survivors for rape and sexual assault. Stern (2014) reported that after Constand filed a police report against Cosby in 2005, media platforms

such as *Celebrity Justice* and *Toronto Sun* identified and named her as Cosby's accuser. Along with this, instead of focusing on Bill Cosby and the allegation of sexual assault, the media published her photo, which made her notable to the public. Beth Ferrier, another alleged victim, publicly delivered her story to the *Philadelphia Daily News* in 2005, but the report did not circulate further. Interestingly, after the video of the stand-up comic went viral, nearly 10 years later, accusations resurfaced with even more women coming forward with tales of misconduct. Currently, 55 women have spoken up and raised allegations of rape and sexual assault against Bill Cosby (Malone, 2015).

The scandal is indicative of the power of the media and the role it plays in disseminating information to the public. Due to the media attention, 55 women have had the opportunity to tell their stories, and rape and sexual assault have become central topics of discussion. The discussion is quite layered, as these accusations are raised against a man who has often been likened to a father figure of the Black community. Bill Cosby is often regarded as one of the most important celebrity figures within the Black community. Starting as an educator, Cosby became noted as a comedian, entertainer, philanthropist, and a quintessential father figure through his portrayal as Dr. Cliff Huxtable in *The Cosby Show*. When he spoke, the Black community typically listened and responded, as noted by Black (2004) who identified him as "the village elder to black audiences," a role that "gives a certain weight to his words in the Black community" (p. 16). Bill Cosby is recognized through many lenses in the community, one of which is based on his accomplishments as an individual with a doctorate, a level of achievement that is still rarely attained by African-American men (Black, 2004). To add to his personal achievements, he is an active contributor and supporter of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and has made several donations.

Cosby's stake in the Black community is extended through his role on various television series, most importantly as Cliff Huxtable in *The Cosby Show*. While assessing how consumers relate to television shows, Russell, Schau, and Crockett (2013) found that *The Cosby Show* was relatable to participants who matched the middle-class lifestyle the Huxtables held. Along with this, for those who did not uphold the middle-class lifestyle, they viewed the television show as aspirational. Not only was the show relatable, it often countered common stereotypes attached to the Black community. *The Cosby Show* was also regarded as groundbreaking and recognized for setting a standard for future television shows such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Cosby's work also extended into developing shows such as *A Different World* and *Little Bill*. An animated television show based on a series of children books written by Cosby, *Little Bill* countered stereotypes about Black communities and highlighted a child growing up with a nuclear, extended family that promoted love and warmth (Hurtado & Silva, 2008). Television networks and the media, which largely focused on White families, communities, and perspectives, did not typically acknowledge these stories. The importance of Bill Cosby and the body of work that he created is recognizable in scholarly work and the media at large.

Considering his presence in the Black community, the numerous allegations of rape and sexual assault raised against Bill Cosby can be understood as confounding to members of the Black community. This includes members who viewed him as Dr. Cliff Huxtable and therefore saw him as the father figure he portrayed on television. The same can be said for members who respected him based on his accomplishments and achievements as a Black man. Cosby was more than an actor, creating shows that challenged stereotypes of the Black community. Therefore, accepting him as an individual with these accomplishments became a battle with the allegations that were raised. Merritt (1991) described Cosby as a "TV Auteur," someone who has the power

to influence programs, challenge television through innovative themes, and allow for his stamp and signature to continuously reflect each program that he contributed to developing.

Cosby could therefore be recognized as a leading force in shaping how the Black community was viewed in the media. In alignment with Cosby's effect as a producer was how the television shows he produced affect audiences. Bill Cosby has been a consistent supporter of HBCUs, which, as mentioned above, is illuminated in his donations to these universities and can also be recognized in television shows he played a role in creating. The HBCUs were highlighted through Cosby's character, Cliff Huxtable on *The Cosby Show*, who, for example, often promoted Hillman College, which also became a central location and focus of the television show *A Different World*. Matabane and Merritt (2014) conducted a study on the effect of the Black media content on the viewer's choices of HBCUs. The researchers found that both *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World* made significant contributions to the female participant's decision of attending HBCUs, which speaks to the ability of content associated with Cosby to boost attendance and interest in these colleges and universities. The results also highlight how Cosby as an individual has affected the Black community through various mediums and identifies how broadly his work has affected the community. Not only was his character significant as a father figure, the shows that he created were also central to decisions made by young Black people.

While there has been a widespread focus on how the media frames conversations regarding rape and sexual assault, research is lacking on media sources that are targeted at the Black community. While research has been conducted on several mediums including blogs and television, researchers have yet to explore one of the more foundational sources of information within the black community. Therefore, this study moves the literature forward by examining

how these platforms navigated the conversation. Considering the status and contributions of Bill Cosby within the community, it is important to understand how the conversation about rape and sexual assault was framed following the various claims that arose against him. At times, Bill Cosby has made comments that created tension within the Black community. Despite this, the community rallies around him due to his achievements and status as a Black man. The support despite such comments is important. It demonstrates the power Cosby maintains within the Black community, which may play a role in how the victims that speak out against him are perceived and how the media frames the allegations about Cosby. While delivering a speech at a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) awards ceremony in May 17, 2004, Cosby criticized the Black community spurring shock, discussions, and outrage throughout the community. Within this speech, Cosby critiqued Black parenthood, requesting that Black parents take a primary role in the upbringing of their children. Cosby's responded to the significant incarceration and dropout rates of Black people, but placed the focus on members of the Black community, ignoring the structural and institutional barriers set in place, which created such difficulties.

Cosby's speech is also often referenced as the Pound Cake speech, due to him placing blame on victims of police brutality, rather than the police. Within the speech, Cosby references children stealing a piece pound cake and laments at the children and the parents, rather than the officer as a point of authority. Cosby's speech is coded in individualism and an expectation for members of the Black community to uplift themselves and the community without assistance. Cosby promotes the Bootstrap Myth, the idea that upholding the appropriate values, in this case defined by Cosby as speaking proper English, having an American name, along with adequate parental upbringing, will lead to the success of members of the Black community, and therefore

lead to the community thriving. Within this speech, Cosby not only upholds the mentality, but also blames the community for failing to reach his standards, ignoring the impact of individual and institutional racism experienced. Despite the uproar the speech created, Cosby continued to deliver similar speeches and interviews, expanding on his beliefs, and disregard criticism from members of the community.

In response to Cosby's speeches, scholar Michael Eric Dyson released *Is Bill Cosby Right?* The book criticized Cosby's stance and gave insight into the mindset behind Cosby's belief in the Bootstrap Myth. Dyson (2008) highlights a class based divide within the Black community, one that leads to him coining the term Afristocracy, which he uses to refer to upper middle class Black people, and Ghetocracy for the Black poor. He notes that for members of the Black community, Cosby's speech may not be a new point of view. In actuality, members of the Afristocracy may commonly uphold Cosby's beliefs. Typically, this conversation is confined within the Black community. Dyson highlights that there is a certain shame associated with the Afristocracy class, who wish to present themselves as beyond members of the Ghetocracy, and the stereotypes associated with people within this group. By speaking out against the Ghetocracy, Cosby brings these individuals, the stereotypes, and the negative association with the Black community into the limelight.

Dyson not only criticizes Cosby's individualistic stance and his belief in the Bootstrap Myth, he provides insight into how the Black community navigates complicated conversations regarding class. In doing so, Dyson highlights a fear, developing out of shame, that forces members of the community to victim blame the Ghetocracy, ignore their experiences, and therefore denouncing the unique multitude experiences of isms including racism and classism. Despite the backlash, Cosby had several defenders who attempted to rationalize his words by

focusing on the context and implications of his statement. Not only did the defenders agree with Cosby, they also advocated that members of the Black community should prioritize educating and rallying one another (Black, 2004; Cole, 2004).

While accusations of rape and sexual assault surrounded Bill Cosby before 2014, the number and vigor strengthened from 2014 to 2015, along with the media focus. Despite the backlash that Cosby received following his speech at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the defense he received also displays the difficulty the Black community faced in rejecting Cosby. Considering his ability to maintain his role with the community, it is important to understand the way in which media reacted to the number of accusations raised against Bill Cosby. While previous research analyzed how the media framed conversations about rape and sexual assault, the proposed study will differ with a focus on online platforms rather than print media. In doing so, this proposed thesis focuses on how online media platforms of the respected magazines, *Essence* and *Ebony*, marketed toward the Black community, responded to the outpour of sexual assault cases raised against Bill Cosby.

Methodology

The paper utilized a qualitative research content analysis with grounded theory as the methodology to create and analyze themes from two of the most popular and widely known magazines that are targeted towards African Americans, *Ebony* and *Essence* magazine. Grounded theory is a way to analyze data and develop themes, categories, and relationships from the given data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Grounded theory, a methodology developed by researchers Glaser and Strauss, focuses on creating theory from data that is gathered and analyzed. While it was initially formed as both a qualitative and quantitative research method to forming theory, it is now primarily associated with qualitative research. (Howard-Payne, 2016).

Although Glaser and Strauss formed the theory together, the researchers separated and formed different techniques to execute the methodology. Due to this, grounded theory now has divergent methods of execution, one of which is through the Glaserian approach, while the other is conducted through the Straussian approach.

Glaserian approach to grounded theory focuses strictly on the data and links the theory to the data repeatedly with a positivist, objective approach to the material (Howard-Payne, 2016). Unlike Glaser, the Straussian approach is informed by pragmatic relativism that works to establish a consensus through multiple outlooks and an understanding of shared knowledge. In doing so, Strauss allows for a development of theory based on the historical context, and a more subjective outlook by the researcher. Strauss therefore developed a conditional matrix to allow for multiple viewpoints for the researcher to consider during the collection and analysis of data (Howard Payne, 2016). Ultimately, a divide is notable in Glaser and Strauss' understanding of utilizing grounded theory as Glaser has a desire for an objective approach to the theory, whereas Strauss focuses on a contextual and subjective outlook when analyzing the data.

This understanding is further magnified when assessing how Strauss and Glaser characterize the role of the researcher, as Howard-Payne (2016) describes that Strauss believes the researcher should be engaged and attached to the work, while Glaser maintains the belief in an objective and neutral researcher. Although research is largely recognized and framed around objectivity, feminist researchers have questioned this practice. The formation of research, including the research topic, the population that is studied, and the associated materials reviewed during the research process are all conducted with a certain amount of knowledge and predetermined interest (Westmarland, 2001). Therefore, research takes shape with a certain amount of subjective interest and ideals, and with this in mind, this study is conducted through

that understanding of research. The study utilized grounded theory as described by Strauss, as feminist researchers have often questioned the ability to remain objective during the research process. The study was shaped through Strauss' methodology, which included an acknowledgment of how ones "histories, experiences, and existing theoretical knowledge," (p. 55) impact how the data is understood and the theory pulled from the data.

The Straussian approach was grounded in feminist researchers' foregoing objectivity and instead, utilized and approached research through Sandra Harding's standpoint theory. Harding (2004) introduced standpoint theory as a manner of questioning the assumption of objectivity associated with the traditional scientific research method. Whereas the traditional scientific research method is centered on a neutral researcher, standpoint theory shifts the power and mindset of the researcher as the objective, all knowing force in research. Standpoint theory functions with situated knowledge, meaning that the researchers acknowledge how their location and experience shapes their knowledge, and how they approach the research they conduct. It further functions through an understanding of the power associated with researchers and how that shapes what they choose to study, how they view their population, community, interpret the data, and the conclusions that are drawn from said researcher (Intemann, 2010). The knowledge of standpoint theory was used in tandem with Straussian approach, which included acknowledging the reasoning behind the interest in this topic. As a young fan of the Cosby Show, Bill Cosby, and the body of work he assembled, this topic has spurred from a collision between an interest in popular culture, Bill Cosby, and an anti-sexist mindset that includes opposition to violence against women, and more specifically, rape and sexual assault.

In examining the media's response, the focus of the research was on media created for the Black community, as Bill Cosby was often revered specifically in the Black community, given

that his accomplishments broke barriers, challenged stereotypes placed on members of the community, and created space for future Black actors to follow in his footsteps in television. Clark and Mosleh (2015) cited *Jet*, *Essence*, and *Ebony* as the top three magazines that were aimed at Black readers, specifically as the “three highest circulating magazines in the United States designed for this audience” (p. 4). In analyzing the circulation figures for *Jet*, *Ebony*, and *Essence*, Clark and Mosleh (2015) found that *Jet* holds a circulation figure of 700,000; *Essence* figure is at approximately 1,050,000, while *Ebony*’s circulation figure is approximately 1,288,553.

The paper is limited the focus to *Essence* and *Ebony* articles posted online. These two media sources allowed for an understanding of possible differences between how *Essence*, a website with a focus of Black women, and *Ebony*, a website with a general focus of Black individuals framed the conversation. *Ebony* was chosen instead of *Jet* because it is the longest running magazine aimed at Black people. While Clark and Mosleh (2015) holds that *Jet* has a higher readership at 8,300,000 compared to *Ebony* at 1,250,000, these numbers are restricted to the magazine’s readership. Vogt (2015) holds that in terms of unique visitors in the month of January, *Ebony* and *Essence*’s websites were among the top sites with unique visitors with 337 and 3,286 visitors respectively. *Jet*’s website was not featured on the list because its viewership was limited in comparison. The focus will therefore be placed on *Ebony* instead.

In recognition of the growing interest in online media access, companies have noted and shifted their work to service online readers. Various companies including *Jet*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *New York* magazine have either reduced or ended their print work, following a drop in advertising revenue, with *Jet* eliminating their print magazines and distributing their content through their website and an application for its paid subscribers (Kaufman, 2014).

Acknowledging this focus on the Internet as a primary source of information, the research is conducted and focuses on articles that are published online, and the results of these articles are used following the Straussian approach of grounded theory.

Various websites exist as sources of information in the rise of the Internet age, particularly for the Black community as Vogt (2015) cites Madamenoire as the Black website with the most unique visitors. Although *Ebony* and *Essence* do not have the same visitor count to match Madamenoire at 9,714, these publications are still branded as the leading sources of information in the Black community for various aspects of their livelihoods including the home, health, family, and celebrity gossip (Kean, Prividera, Howard, & Gates, 2014). Therefore, it is expected that following the allegations being raised of a celebrity with the respect, power, and magnitude of someone with Cosby's status, *Ebony* and *Essence* would be among the first publications expected to report on such allegations. Altogether *Ebony* and *Essence*'s were chosen rather than Madamenoire due to the two website's base as a source of knowledge historically in the Black community.

Ebony and *Essence* are recognized as impactful sources of information in the Black community. Despite this, as Clark and Mosleh (2015) state, the information extracted from the websites is not utilized "as a direct reflection of the behavior or the attitudes of the audiences. They might, however be instrumental in suggesting and reflecting an agenda regarding what issues should be talked about and considered relevant for contemplation and action" (4). Therefore, the information gathered and theory formed is used as insight into the Black community, and how the conversation around rape and sexual assault is navigated and measured. Online articles were collected and inspected from the moment that Cosby was accused by Hannibal Buress in October of 2014, as that was the moment that lead to a flurry of accusations

raised against Cosby, to March 5, 2016, as that was the date the final article regarding the allegations raised against Cosby was published in *Essence*.

The research follows Straussian grounded theory, which, according to Thai, Chong, and Agrawal (2013), “mandates a recursive process of data collection, data coding, comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation” (p. 5). Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the process as described by Strauss.

Figure 1. Grounded Theory's Recursive Analytic Operations (Locke, 1996, p. 240)

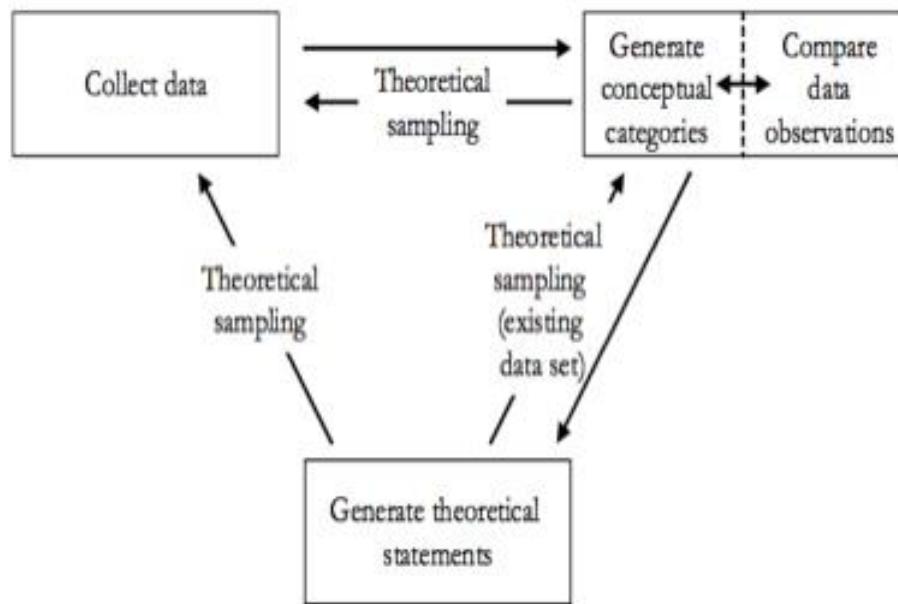


Figure 1. Grounded theory methodology as described by Strauss.

A search was made for articles that discussed the allegations raised against Bill Cosby using the search term “Bill Cosby” on both Ebony.com and Essence.com. From the search, Ebony’s website held five pages of articles with 47 articles related to Cosby. Of the 47 articles, 42 were related to the allegations raised against Cosby based on the given timeline, which narrows the gap of consideration from October 2014 to March 5, 2016. An article was identified

as relevant, if it raised an allegation of assault against Bill Cosby, but fell outside of the scope of consideration based on the timeline given, as it was published on February 13, 2014. Essence.com published 1333 articles about Bill Cosby, with 53 articles considered to be relevant based on the timeline and the parameters of the articles, such as the focus on allegations raised against Cosby.

With the data collected, Dedoose was used for the analysis process. Dedoose is digital analysis platform created to allow researchers to analyze qualitative and mixed method data. The platform was created by researchers, for researchers, which allows it to be easily accessible and user friendly. Utilizing Dedoose 1.0, theoretical sampling began from the first article from *Ebony*'s website, where concepts drawn led to the following article. Most articles posted on *Ebony* and *Essence*'s websites were aggregated from other websites and platforms. Given that these articles were posted on the website, they were incorporated into the research and fully analyzed in comparison to the original source website. Although the content was not originally developed by *Ebony* or *Essence*, the articles were incorporated by these companies, and fit the necessary parameters to include as representative of these magazines. Theoretical sampling began with an analysis of the titles of the article, and then the content, with a focus on how the material is phrased and conducted in order to create necessary categories and themes during the analysis stage. Every article was read once to gain an understanding of the content without taking notes or analyzing the materials. Afterwards, the article was reviewed once more, using open coding to form categories.

Open coding is a way for researchers to analyze data, opening all possibilities of said data before labeling and conceptualizing the content (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Conceptualizing data includes filtering through the data to understand what is expressed and then labeling and

categorizing the information. Categories that are formed are then reanalyzed in the following articles as more data is collected until saturation. Corbin and Strauss (2008) consider saturation to be a point in research where there are no new emerging categories, and also when the categories and observations can be used to develop relationships with other concepts, ultimately forming the overall theory. Saturation will therefore be met after concepts are generated and overarching themes are formed between from the articles assessed.

To begin, articles from *Ebony*'s website was initially entered into Dedoose, and memos were created when specific keywords or sentences were noted as significant. The choice of significance varied from victim blaming language, to changes from the source articles that *Ebony* edited on their website. The memos contained notes regarding thoughts about the highlighted text and memo groups were created to function as initial codes within the memos. After each article was analyzed, multiple analyses were conducted with particular focus on the notes and questions raised in the memos. This process continued until the memos were condensed and saturation led to final conceptual categories. This information was used to create the conceptual categories, which were then analyzed once more to form themes. Articles taken from *Essence*'s website were taken through the same process of highlighting text, creating memos with accompanied notes, condensing the notes and memo groups into categories, and then forming themes. Themes that were formed from the articles were then reassessed along with memo notes, which lead to the emergent Fractured Conversation Model featuring the four dimensions of the model.

Results

Fifty-three articles from *Essence*'s website and 42 articles from *Ebony*'s website were analyzed, which led to the emergence of the fractured conversation model (FCM). The model

emerged after analyzing similar themes discovered from articles on the two websites. The following themes were divided into two major sections. These themes were developed from the titles *Essence* utilized and the content of the magazine.

I. Essence

The following two primary themes emerged from the *Essence* website's titles: context and no context. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the articles and themes. These themes were used to describe whether *Essence* provided further information in its titles for its readers to understand, follow, and engage with, regarding the allegations of rape and sexual assault raised against Bill Cosby. Forty-four articles were coded with "no context," meaning that they did not include enough information for readers to develop an understanding of how the case was progressing from the title alone. Featured titles that were coded as no context include the following examples, "NBC Drops Bill Cosby's Comedy Series (2014)," "Bill Cosby Not Welcome at Alma Mater (2014)," and "3 more Bill Cosby Accusers Come Forward (2015)." These titles lack enough contextual information for a reader to engage in discussion, particularly given that there is no context in the title that ties in the allegations of rape and sexual assault.

While readers can presume that these relate to the allegations raised against Cosby, the titles do not give enough context to receive the information without prior knowledge of the case. Forty-four articles were coded with no context, with nine giving enough information, primarily using the words rape and sexual assault. Examples of the articles that established the context include the first article that discussed the allegations raised against Bill Cosby, titled "Bill Cosby Still Has No Comment Amid Growing Rape Allegations (2014)," and "Keshia Knight-Pulliam Explains Why She Didn't Discuss Sexual Assault Allegations with Bill Cosby (2015)." Both articles specifically engage the readers in what the allegations raised against Bill Cosby are

about, and therefore allow the readers to proceed reading the article with a foundation of how serious the topic is and with a foundational understanding of the status of the allegations.

Table 1 Number of articles featuring the following themes in the Essence.com title	
Context	No context
9	44
Total (N = 53)	

Table 2 highlights the major themes that were discovered within the content of the articles posted on *Essence*'s website. The three major themes found were Bill Cosby, language, and the Black media. Categories were developed to encompass these larger themes, which are noted in Figure 1. These categories represent codes that were developed during the analysis stage.

Table 2 Emergent themes and categories found in Essence.com content			
Emergent Themes	Bill Cosby	Language	Black Media
Categories	Cosby on offense Cosby admittance Cosby as victim	Word choice	Expectations Artist vs. art

Bill Cosby

Three primary categories were identified underneath the theme of Bill Cosby during the analysis stage: Cosby on offense, Cosby admittance, and Cosby as victim. Cosby on offense developed out of *Essence*'s round up articles. These articles only featured information regarding the allegations raised against Bill Cosby in the title when the content highlighted Cosby as an active individual taking a step toward refuting the allegations raised against him. A primary example is in the roundup article titled "Coffee Talk: Bill Cosby Plans to Sue Woman for

Extortion (2014)" which discusses that Cosby is suing a woman who raised allegations against him for extortion, which leads to Cosby being identified as a victim of extortion and fits the already circulating narrative of the women as raising these allegations against Cosby for financial gain. A second category that developed within the theme of Bill Cosby is Cosby admittance. This category grew out of the shift that occurred following the depositions, which revealed that Cosby purchased drugs for women with whom he wanted to engage in sexual activity. Prior to the testimony being released, Cosby had a solid backing from several celebrities despite the number and celebrity status of the women who raised allegations against him. It was following his admittance that a shift came, and certain celebrities including Whoopi Goldberg and Jill Scott recanted their support. The content of the following article further expands on this category:

In the deposition, Cosby admitted he'd obtained Quaaludes to give women with whom he wanted to have sex. Some 37 women have accused Cosby of drugging and sexually assaulting them.

"I stood by a man I respected and loved. I was wrong," the Grammy winning singer tweeted. "We live in America. Many African American men are detained (and)/or imprisoned for crimes without evidence. I will never jump on bandwagons. Proof will always matter more than public opinion. The sworn testimony is proof. Completely disgusted."

She continued: "No. I'm not sorry for standing by my mentor. I'm sorry the accusations (are) true," she added (Toby, 2015, para. 3).

Cosby's admittance served as the catalyst for the women being believed and their claims becoming legitimized in the eyes of the public. The final category identified within the theme of

Bill Cosby is the narrative of Cosby as a victim. This category developed from articles that utilized specific language and word choice to highlight what Cosby was losing, as more accusations came to the forefront. Given that as the number of women who raised allegations against him grew, more companies and universities chose to disassociate themselves from Cosby. “This is the latest blow to Cosby’s legacy. Earlier this month, NBC canceled his upcoming comedy series and Netflix postponed his Thanksgiving comedy special as new rape allegations surfaced (Doggett, 2014, para. 5).”

In the following article, *Essence* discusses Cosby not being welcomed at his alma mater, and ends the article with the above quote. By framing the narrative as this being a blow to Cosby’s legacy with Cosby losing his comedy series and potentially his comedy special, Cosby is positioned as an individual whose opportunities are being taken and is recognized as someone experiencing a severe loss. All of this is worsened by the lack of focus on the women who are speaking out against him and their losses in the process. Therefore, readers become more empathetic toward Cosby, particularly with the lack of focus on the women’s experiences.

Language

Language encapsulates several articles on *Essence*’s website and was the most selected code during the analysis phase. Language was utilized in the coding process whenever bias was noted within the text that led to Cosby being positioned as a victim, when the article conflated Bill Cosby with his character on *The Cosby Show*, Cliff Huxtable, or when the article seemed to reduce the allegations raised against Cosby and therefore the issue of rape and sexual assault to a simple celebrity gossip affair. Word choice was a primary category identified within the language theme on *Essence*’s website. This category was used whenever *Essence* selected specific words that dramatized the effect of the allegations raised against Cosby or the effect of

the allegations on his career and legacy. Within an article titled “Essence poll: would you continue to support your husband through public scandals? (2014)” language is coded multiple times, including during the excerpt below.

Camille Cosby is no stranger to controversy surrounding her famous husband. The allegations of rape began all the way back in 1969. Not to mention his extra-marital affair in 1997. But she's stayed by his side, despite the public scrutiny.

When a couple gets married they vow to stay together for better or for worse. But “for worse” can get a lot worse when the world is watching your marriage (Doggett, 2014).

Both language and word choice were signaled within the website’s use of the word controversy to describe the allegations of rape and sexual assault raised against Cosby. The utilization of the word controversy does not accurately capture the severity and the implications of those allegations on both Cosby and the women who came forward to speak out about the assault. Furthermore, language was identified in the last sentence; within the sentence, *Essence*’s focus of leaving a marriage is about the pressure of the outside world, rather than the effect of the allegations of rape and sexual assault, and how those allegations can affect an individual’s view of the marriage.

Black Media

The Black media was the final theme identified in 53 articles analyzed from *Essence*’s website. This theme developed out of the phrases and articles associated with the Black community. Encompassed within the theme are two categories including expectations and artist vs. art. Expectations grew specifically from an article titled “Bill Cosby speaks out, Black media should stay neutral (2014),” which featured the expectation regarding Cosby for the Black media

to stay neutral when discussing the allegations raised against him. This expectation can be assumed to derive from several places including Cosby's presence and accomplishments within the community as well as his status, wealth, and power as a Black man. The expectation category also developed from an article which infuses the idea of standing by their man, where *Essence* polls its readers, asking whether they would continue to support their husbands through public scandals. Throughout the media, women are often requested to and praised for continuously supporting their partners through various trials and tribulations, and this poll fits within that narrative of questioning whether the primary audience of Black female readers would continue to support their husbands.

II. Ebony

As stated above, 42 articles were analyzed from *Ebony*'s website. Table 3 highlights the primary themes developed from the website's titles. Of the 42 articles, 31 articles were edited from the source, five articles featured original content, and the remainder of the articles was unable to be analyzed due to the original source being deleted. These themes are significant, as *Ebony*'s titles often edged away from the words *rape* and *sexual assault* in their titles. In fact, *Ebony* used *rape* within a title once in an article where President Obama defines rape. This was during an interview when the president was questioned about Bill Cosby and the allegations that were raised against him. *Ebony*'s website uses the word *sexual assault* four times within the 42 article titles. The term *sexual assault* was only used when Bill Cosby released a statement following months of silence, regarding lawsuits and charges filed against Cosby and regarding the women who raised allegations of rape and sexual assault against him.

Table 3Number of articles featuring the following themes in *Ebony.com* titles

<u>Edited titles</u>	<u>Unedited titles</u>
34	0
Total (N = 42)	

Table 4Emergent themes and categories found in *Ebony's* content

Emergent Themes	Article	Language	Rape Culture	Lack of depth	Black women
Categories	Original content Derived content	Descriptors	# of women Politics Rape Ebony versus source Artist versus art	Limiting conversation Missed connection	Self silencing

Table 4 captures the five themes found during the analysis of *Ebony's* website. These themes include (a) article, (b) language, (c) rape culture, (d) depth, and (e) Black women. Language was a theme that was also identified on *Essence's* website, but most themes found in *Ebony's* article are unique to the site.

Article

Ebony's first major theme is article, which was pulled from an understanding that, while *Ebony* primarily featured content derived from other websites, it also included select opinion pieces and an interview featuring Beverly Johnson. Beverly Johnson is one of the women who came forward and stated that Cosby drugged her. She is also an iconic model and holds many accomplishments including being the first Black woman with a Vogue cover. *Ebony's* website included five opinion pieces that touched on several issues regarding the allegations raised against Cosby. Ranging from the difficulty Black women face in having to separate the artist from the art in issues regarding violence against women, particularly against Black women, to identifying victim blaming and the perpetuation of rape culture in the defense of Bill Cosby, these opinion pieces allowed for the richest analysis and an opportunity to form an understanding of how *Ebony* engaged its readers, beyond replicating information that has previously been posted online.

Language

Another theme that developed from *Ebony's* website was language, which evolved from the way certain articles were phrased and the way descriptions were used to heighten the accomplishments Bill Cosby achieved. Descriptors was a specific category that emerged under language, which was used whenever adjectives were applied in accordance with Cosby's name that further established him as a prominent figure in the Black community. The following excerpt shows an example of the descriptor category along with specific language that was coded, which exemplifies the language theme.

Who is working Bill Cosby's PR team? Public opinion hasn't been kind to the comedy icon, as 20 women have accused him of sexually assaulting them. But his silence—

literally going mute when NPR's Scott Simon asked about the allegations during a recent interview—hasn't helped his case at all. Well, Cosby has finally addressed the charges yesterday (December 3). Or rather thanked his supporters, Whoopi Goldberg and Jill Scott, who have publicly defended the head of the Huxtable household (Kennedy, 2014).

Within this excerpt, *Ebony* refers to Cosby as a "comedy icon" and the "head of the Huxtable household." Both descriptions focus on the accomplishments that Cosby has attained and even signal his role as Cliff Huxtable, the father figure character, and not Bill Cosby, the man who has had allegations of rape and sexual assault raised against him. Therefore, readers hold familiar images of Cosby. These images are drawn from the favorable memories of him as Cliff Huxtable, along with the effect of his accomplishments on the Black community. The women raising allegations of rape and sexual assault against Cosby are not afforded the same connections and descriptors connecting their accomplishments that may bias the readers and affect how they receive the information regarding the allegations.

Rape Culture

Rape culture developed out of several categories including the number of women, politics, rape, *Ebony* versus source, and artist versus art. The theme encapsulates how *Ebony* addresses and pinpoints rape culture during its opinion pieces but also perpetuates rape culture in several posted articles. One way *Ebony*'s website perpetuates rape culture is through its estimation and the vague count it kept while discussing the number of women who raised allegations against Cosby. Oftentimes, the website would distort the number of women using language such as "several women," "dozens of women," or "a barrage of sexual assault allegations." While this primarily occurred from articles that were recopied on *Ebony*'s website, *Ebony* has demonstrated that it has the liberty to reword articles that are copied and added from

other websites. Therefore, *Ebony* had chosen to allow these vague representations of the number of women who raised allegations against Cosby. It is critical to have clear numbers due to the rampant conspiracy theories and a need for a substantial voice for these women. This is particularly important given that Cosby naturally has a strong backing due to his position and power in the industry. A solid count rather than vague estimations is one way to establish that voice.

A second category that emerged was politics, which primarily evolved out of the realization that certain institutions engaged in politically motivated decisions before addressing the victims' allegations of rape and sexual assault. One case is seen when Andrea Constand initially wanted charges filed against Cosby in 2005, but the case was dismissed due to lack of evidence. It has taken 10 years and support through further allegations raised against Cosby, along with a newly elected prosecutor, which often leads to a desire to uphold a strong stance, for the case to be reviewed and Cosby to be charged. Although it may not have been politically viable for a prosecutor to charge Cosby 10 years ago, the shift in media attention toward Cosby, particularly due to the number of raised allegations of rape and sexual assault along with Cosby's admittance in his deposition to purchasing drugs for women, creates a new political climate for the prosecutor.

The category rape was not very prominent within the coded process, but it is important to highlight that a conversation was developing within the opinion pieces that were written on *Ebony*'s website. Rape was highlighted and specifically defined in an article titled "Finally finished: how is your Bill Cosby defense holding up today? (2015)" which, among other things, identified victim blaming, the prominence of rape culture, and the tendency to create blurred

lines to defend Cosby and find new ways to support him. One of the two codes that were used to create the rape category emerged from the following excerpt:

For those who may be unclear, using drugs (or alcohol!) deliberately to loosen women's inhibitions in hopes that they will either consent to sex or be unable to decline sex is rape. There's no gray area, no "I really thought she wanted to do it too" when you provide drugs to ensure someone doesn't, or can't, say no (Lemieux, 2015).

Here *Ebony* specifically defines rape and removes the idea of a gray area that is often used to obscure blame from the perpetrator when it comes to rape and sexual assault. It is then used to shift blame to the victim and essentially leave the perpetrator blameless in the situation. This direct clarity is important when discussing rape and sexual assault, particularly with drugs and alcohol, where the focus is typically on the victim not taking drugs or drinking, rather than the perpetrator not using these things to remove the victim's ability to consent.

Ebony vs. source developed from taking note of the website creating small changes within the title and text of the articles, which shifts how the conversation regarding rape and sexual assault occurs with readers. An example is "Gawker reports that two more women have come forward, claiming they were drugged and raped by Cosby (TeamEbony, 2015)." This tagline differs from Gawker's original tagline, which stated that: "On Friday, two additional women came forward with claims they were raped by Bill Cosby, one of whom says she was just 17 at the time, The Wrap reports (Hongo, 2015)."

There is one primary difference between how *Ebony* worded its tagline and how *Gawker* originally posted the sentence. *Ebony* uses passive language by stating that the women were drugged and raped by Cosby, whereas *Gawker* uses active language, which shows that Cosby is doing the action of drugging and raping the women and is the primary participant and full

perpetrator who receives the focus. Through *Ebony*'s sentence, the women are being drugged and raped but are still the focal point, as the action is occurring to them, and Cosby becomes the passive participant. *Ebony* makes several shifts in titles and their taglines including removing the words rape and sexual assault from their titles, despite it being utilized within the source. Decisions such as these distort the conversation of rape and sexual assault and affect how readers are absorbing the information and engaging in discussions themselves.

The final category that emerged is the artist versus the art, which encompasses the conflation of Bill Cosby and Cliff Huxtable, along with the dilemma that was often discussed with continuing support or appreciation for the accomplishments that Cosby achieved. *Ebony*'s work itself often demonstrated difficulty separating the artist from the art using language that signaled Cliff Huxtable, such as "head of the Huxtable household." The website also discussed the difficulty that a lot of its readers who grew up watching Cosby have undergone, while wanting to hold on to the memories of Cliff Huxtable and the work he developed and integrated into his legacy but were struggling to do so with the allegations raised against him.

Lack of Depth

Lack of depth was characterized by *Ebony*'s ability to take advantage of given opportunities to expand and engage in discussion of rape and sexual assault beyond the Bill Cosby scandal. This theme developed out of the various op-eds and interviews with Beverly Johnson, one of the women who accused Cosby of drugging her. While *Ebony* demonstrated depth by utilizing the opinion pieces to extend the conversation, they also had moments, when using copied information, where they limited the conversation and missed connections. A specific article titled, "Bill Cosby admits to buying sedatives for women he wants to have sex

with,” exemplifies this situation where depositions revealed Cosby admitting to purchasing sedatives for women.

Bill Cosby Admits to Buying Sedatives for Women He Wanted to Have Sex With

JET reports that Cosby testified in 2005 that he got Quaaludes with the intent of giving them to young women he wanted to sleep with by JET, July 06, 2015

Bill Cosby testified in 2005 that he got Quaaludes with the intent of giving them to young women he wanted to have sex with, and he admitted giving the sedative to at least one woman and “other people,” according to documents obtained Monday by The Associated Press. The AP had gone to court to compel the release of the documents; Cosby’s lawyers had objected on the grounds that it would embarrass their client.

The 77-year-old comedian was testifying under oath in a lawsuit filed by a former Temple University employee. He testified he gave her three half-pills of Benadryl. Cosby settled that sexual-abuse lawsuit for undisclosed terms in 2006. His lawyers in the Philadelphia case did not immediately return phone calls Monday (JET, 2015).

Within this article is the opportunity to extend the testimony to the allegations of rape and sexual assault and link the stories of the women who accused Cosby of drugging them before committing the assault. Instead, *Ebony* leaves the conversation at the testimony, which leaves readers to form the connections on their own. It is important to recognize that, despite *Ebony*’s inclusion of opinion pieces and the solitary interview, the website does not go to greater lengths to include the voices of the victims within most the articles analyzed and therefore limits the depth of the conversation about rape and sexual assault and the allegations raised against Bill Cosby.

Black Women

Despite being among the women who raised allegations of rape and sexual assault against Cosby, Black women are often either self-silenced or had their stories neglected by the public. The theme of Black women was drawn from this conclusion, which can be seen in *Ebony*'s interview with Beverly Johnson, and with the statistics that *Ebony* details in the following opinion piece.

African-American women are more likely to face sexual abuse than their white counterparts. According to Black Women's Blueprint, 60 percent of black girls have experienced sexual abuse by age 18 – most at the hands of black men. (Over 90% of sexual assaults occur between people of the same ethnic or racial background.) What space does the black community give those women to heal and receive justice if its primary concern is always burnishing the public face of always-victimized black manhood? Can't talk about the deacon, because what about the flock? Can't talk about the basketball star, because what about the season? Can't talk about the community activist, because what about the community? Can't talk about Bill Cosby, because what about Malcolm Jamal Warner's residuals? Just shut up and let those black men be admired – whether they deserve it or not (Harris, 2015).

Despite being more likely to face sexual abuse than their White counterparts, African-American women were self-silencing for a myriad of reasons, including because Black men's voices are being upheld and valued more than Black women's. This can be seen and perpetuated by *Ebony*, which creates spaces for 42 articles but only highlights Beverly Johnson as one of the women who came forward regarding allegations of being forcibly drugged twice and fails to highlight any other women beyond the articles that were taken from other media sources. *Ebony*

therefore does not make the space for other Black women's voices. Therefore, Bill Cosby's name and defense runs rampant in the mind of the readers, but the names and stories of Black women who share their stories are not regarded to the same effect.

III. Fractured Conversation Model

The FCM is the development of analysis and drawn conclusions from the themes created from both *Ebony* and *Essence*'s websites. The model represents the attempts at engaging and developing a conversation about rape and sexual assault, as seen in the questions and polls on *Essence*'s website asking their readers whether they would continue to defend their husbands after a scandal. Attempts at generating conversation can also be seen in *Ebony*'s online opinion piece, which pushes for conversations beyond Bill Cosby but also analyzes victim blaming, rape culture, and how the Black community pushes Black women to a place of self-silencing by favoring the careers and opportunities of Black men. Within all this conversation are fractured pieces of *Ebony* and *Essence* also engaging and perpetuating behavior such as victim blaming and rape culture. The FCM explains the pieces that collectively, in a positive and negative manner, lead to limited dialog. The dialog therefore fails to convey resources for victims of rape and sexual assault and tips to help someone, if there is a fear that someone within their inner circle has been assaulted.

The FCM functions through discussion of the perpetrator and the rape and sexual assault, as seen in the discussion of Bill Cosby and the allegations that were raised against Cosby being tracked, followed, and updated by the websites. It also follows up, particularly within minority communities, with an engagement of race, class, and gender dynamics, which is dependent on how it applies to the perpetrator and victims who raised allegations against them. With regards to Cosby, there was a great focus on racism and false accusations raised against Black men by

White women, along with police brutality, which heightens an awareness of wrong accusations and treatment toward Black men.

There was also a degree of focus on Black women's unique position of wanting fair treatment for Black men, and therefore self-silencing to accomplish that, which places a weight on their ability to be open regarding experiencing rape or sexual assault. The model becomes fractured when signs of victim blaming can be actualized, along with the perpetuation of rape culture. Despite the depth of the conversation that can be achieved with the first two sections of the model, it is impossible to move forward in the conversation with signs of victim blaming and the perpetuation of rape culture. Not only does it limit the conversation, it prevents survivors from speaking and therefore stalls the conversation entirely.

Table 5

Fractured Conversation Model as a function of themes from *Ebony* and *Essence*

Fractured Conversation Model	Discussion of the perpetuation of rape and sexual assault	Engagement of race/class/gender dynamics	Utilization of victim blaming rhetoric	Perpetuation of rape culture
Emergent Themes	Bill Cosby Article	Black women	Language Rape culture	Language Black media Lack of depth

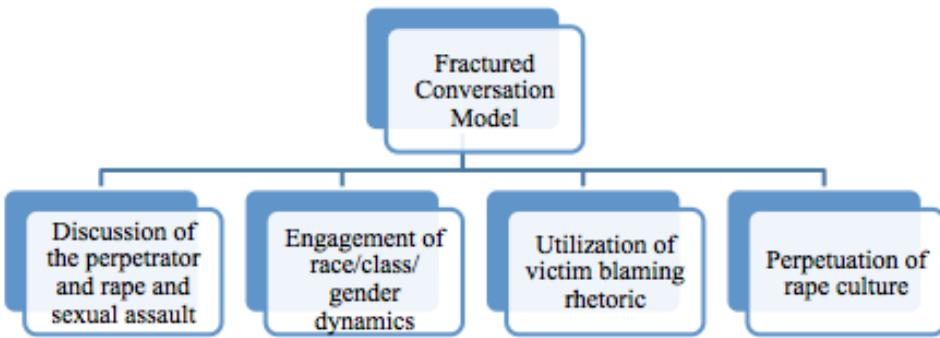


Figure 5. The Fractured Conversation Model

Discussion

Grounded theory was used to analyze a total of 95 articles with 53 from *Essence's* website and 42 articles from *Ebony's* website. The theory was used to understand how the following websites managed and engaged in the discussion of rape and sexual assault following the allegations raised against Bill Cosby. After analysis, several categories and themes emerged, which led to the development of the FCM. The model explains how *Ebony* and *Essence* engaged in conversations about rape and sexual assault with their readers but demonstrated signs of victim blaming and perpetuated rape culture within their articles. The FCM functions through a discussion of the perpetrator and the rape and sexual assault and the intersectional analysis of race, class, and gender but becomes fractured in the utilization of victim blaming rhetoric and the perpetuation of rape culture.

An interesting aspect of the model is the lack of inclusion of rape myths, which is missing because of the lack of focus on the rape allegations and the hyper-focus on sexual assault by both websites. The discussion of the perpetrator and the rape and sexual assault are concepts that have emerged in previous research findings. Particularly, whenever a celebrity is accused of rape or sexual assault, the accusation leads to a media circulation and focus on that individual and the topic of rape and sexual assault. This can be witnessed with previous celebrity allegations, such as Kobe Bryant and Woody Allen. When researchers analyze the depth and effectiveness of the conversation generated, similar themes of victim blaming and the perpetuation of rape culture emerges, which supports the FCM.

Easteal, Holland, and Judd (2015) found a recurrence of victim blaming language in an analysis of the media's portrayal of violence against women. Their research further links this issue to a simplistic, conservative dialog regarding the topic. The researchers identified the media's tendency to portray acts of violence against women as isolated incidents, rather than assess underlying issues including hyper-masculinity and the effect of existing within a patriarchal culture. The researchers further problematize this simplistic lens that the media often views and discusses violence against women. The lens through which the media approaches the conversation of rape and sexual assault also leads to gender roles and gendered expectations of women and men being further enforced (Eastel et al. 2015). The perpetuation of victim blaming and rape culture sets an expectation for women to remain alert and monitor their clothing, actions, environment, and surroundings. Men are therefore free from having to change their habits and excluded from the conversation of not engaging in the acts of rape and sexual assault.

Easteal et al. (2015) further explained how the conception of the perfect rape victim is strengthened through the use and exclusion of certain words, which was a prevalent theme

discussed in the findings of this analysis. Categorized under the theme of language was a heightened degree of victim blaming rhetoric, some that was blatant and some that was masked and identified within the categories of limiting conversation and missed connections.

In returning to the initial research questions raised, research emerged that demonstrates the mechanisms as dictated through the FCM. The literature supports the presence of the concepts defined in the FCM model. An interesting aspect of the model is the lack of inclusion of rape myths, which is missing because of the lack of focus on the rape allegations and the hyper-focus on sexual assault by both websites. Despite Cosby being accused of both rape and sexual assault on separate accounts, the primary focus was placed on the allegations of sexual assault, so much so that in an article by *Ebony* where Cosby was accused of rape, the article includes the words rape as sexual assault and therefore masks the act of rape within the allegations of sexual assault raised against Bill Cosby. In doing so, the individual focus that allegations of rape are not highlighted by *Ebony*. While the rape was not specifically a focus, there was employment of the language in rape myths due to the focus of artists who defended and demonstrated support toward Cosby. In the coverage of these artists, *Ebony* and *Essence*'s websites allowed for language that deployed rape myths on their websites. Despite it not being language from *Ebony* or *Essence* specifically, research has demonstrated that exposure to rape myths makes readers less likely to believe that the alleged assailant committed the act of rape and sexual assault (Franiuk, Seefelt, & Vandello, 2008). The research demonstrates this without the addition of celebrity influence on the rape myths, which can only serve to heighten the belief that an accused assailant such as Cosby was innocent regarding the allegations of rape and sexual assault.

While both *Ebony* and *Essence*'s websites provided updates regarding the alleged victims and their stories about the rape and sexual assault, *Ebony* does a moderately better job of

promoting the narrative of the alleged victims. This occurs primarily through *Ebony* including not only Beverly Johnson's essay on *Vanity Fair*'s website, which was also done by *Essence*, but also through the personal interview *Ebony* conducted with *Johnson*, which further promoted her narrative. As a magazine created for Black women, it is surprising to discover that *Essence* was not a location where at least Beverly Johnson had her essay posted or gave an interview considering how much she accomplished for Black women as the first Black model with a *Vogue* cover, among her accomplishments. Although *Essence* was created to represent Black women's interests, which translated to its website, the company had a change in ownership in 2011 from White to Black ownership, which could have affected the type of media and representation for the alleged victims (Prince, 2013). Although *Ebony*'s magazine and website underwent a change in ownership, the company remains a Black owned business in leadership, which may be a reason for the depth demonstrated in the opinion pieces and the focus on violence against Black women through the interview with Beverly Johnson and its pieces.

While both websites did not go above and beyond to promote the narratives of the victims, *Ebony*'s inclusion of opinion pieces that discussed several important topics, including victim blaming, rape culture, forced drugging, rape, and sexual assault, also considerably promoted and supported the victims' narratives. Although this was important, both magazines also engaged in victim blaming rhetoric, as discussed above, which reduced the support and inhibited their narratives. Along with this, while Beverly Johnson's interview was an important focus, the same focus was not provided for other victims, and the lack of attention to detail on even the number of victims that were allegedly assaulted also inhibited the victim's story (Kelly, 2016).

According to *Ebony*'s, 2017 media kit, approximately 45.5% of their adult readers have a household income of \$50,000 or more (*Ebony*, 2017). *Essence*'s 2017 media kit shows that approximately 44% of their readers have a household income of \$50,000 or more (*Essence*, 2017). Bringing back the discussion of the Afristocracy and Ghettoctacy, this places *Ebony* and *Essence* as organizations that cater to members of the Afristocracy. Considering its readership is largely made up of members of the middle class within the Black community, the tendency to adhere to the mindset that Dyson discussed can be understood. Within his work, Dyson discussed the shame members of the Aristocracy feel towards members of the Ghettoctacy. This shame often prevents an understanding of the institutional barriers that impact members of the Ghettoctacy, and leads to victim blaming as dictated by Cosby in his critique of the Black community.

This shame is also reflected in *Ebony* and *Essence*'s responses to the accusations of rape and sexual assault raised against Cosby, and within the pieces that make up FCM. The pieces are particularly pronounced with the victim blaming rhetoric and the perpetuation of rape culture, just as Cosby and members of the Aristocracy uphold victim blaming rhetoric and perpetuations of the Bootstrap myth. The similarities in these findings ultimately demonstrate a difficulty the Black community undergoes in navigating complicated whether regarding class disparities or rape and sexual assault. The tendency to simplify these discussions by employing victim blaming rhetoric or perpetuating myths upholds the dominant systematic ideologies, and negatively impacts the livelihoods and survival of victims and survivors of rape and sexual assault. Given *Ebony* and *Essence*'s readership, future research should explore other companies to understand how one's readership may impact the depth of conversations behind held. Platforms such as Twitter, which includes communities like Black Twitter, would also allow for broad scale insight

of different class standings navigate this conversation. These findings will allow for an understanding of how class impacts the discussion of rape and sexual assault, but on a broad scale, lend insight into how the Black community navigates conversations that become complicated due to the racist, sexist, classist, and patriarchal, among others, society that we inhabit.

Despite the steps taken to assure the validity and reliability of the design, there are certain limitations to the study. While it is recommended that grounded theory be conducted without an expectation of findings, there were expected questions raised prior to the analysis phase along with parameters for the date of the research in terms of an end date to create boundaries for the study. This could have possibly created an early saturation period because no further articles were assessed beyond the end, which therefore could have affected the outcome of the study. Along with that, having one researcher during the analysis stage rather than multiple researchers could have affected this research. Detailed notes were taken to address this issue to assure that the process was honest to the grounded theory methodology. Finally, the qualitative research methods naturally tend to bias due to the researcher's interpretation of the data, although, again, notes were taken and steps undergone to eliminate as much bias as possible during the research process.

Future research should attempt to repeat the study with multiple researchers to cross check, with open parameters to meet a natural saturation within the research process. Researchers should also consider including social media platforms, particularly the voice of "Black Twitter," and engaging that medium in the research process. Black Twitter is a new booming voice on Twitter, which gathers the voices of activists and citizens from various domains. Black Twitter has become a community on Twitter for African Americans to connect

and share their experiences, particularly when the media introduces breaking news to the public (Guo, 2015). Their opinions and the conversation that is engaged as the allegations are raised against Cosby allow another dimension and lens into how rape and sexual assault are discussed within the Black community. Although online journalists may be bound by the rules from their editors and supervisors, Black Twitter has become an unfiltered insight into the Black community, which allows researchers to not only compare the two magazines but also gain a perspective from members of the community.

Despite its limitations, the FCM adds one way of understanding how the Black community has engaged in a discussion of rape and sexual assault. While researchers have extensively explored how the media engages in the conversation of rape and sexual assault, FCM allows the exploration of how the conversation may shift based on and due to individual's identities and how they develop within the Black community. The model highlights the similarities across communities but also notes distinct topics that come under discussion within the community. Therefore, FCM creates an understanding for researchers to build upon and expand, particularly when exploring rape and sexual assault within and outside the Black community.

Reflection

As a young fan of the Cosby Show, Bill Cosby, and the body of work he assembled, this topic spurred from a collision between an interest in popular culture, Bill Cosby, and an anti-sexist mindset that includes opposition to violence against women, and more specifically, rape and sexual assault. The results of this study, and particularly the Fractured Conversation Model are disappointing to uncover as a researcher. While the literature supports the fractures within the model, I certainly hoped that the findings would signify that the community could look beyond

Cosby to show a deeper level of support for Black women. More specifically, I hoped that *Essence* would lead the way in discussing the experiences of Black women, and identifying resources and support systems to assist victims and survivors. Instead, *Ebony's* opinion pieces allowed space for Black women. In one particular op-ed, there was expression of the struggle Black feminists face with consuming and supporting work by Black artists with allegations of rape and sexual assault raised. I could relate to the difficulty expressed within the article. In recognizing that these findings go beyond Bill Cosby, I personally continue to question how to consume art created by artists within the community who enact violence against Black women. I recognize that there is no solution that would rightfully allow such consumption, and this debate will continue with little resolve until violence against women is no longer an issue.

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Essence 2017 media kit [PDF file]. (2017). Retrieved from <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/76872185/2017%20ESSENCE%20MEDIA%20KIT.pdf>

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Appendix A

Table 6 Articles featuring the following themes in the Essence.com title	
<u>Theme 1</u> Context	<u>Theme 2</u> No Context
Context	No Context
Bill Cosby Still Has No Comment Amid Growing Rape Allegations Tuesday, November 18, 2014	“NBC Drops Bill Cosby’s Comedy Series” Wednesday, November 19, 2014
Raven Symoné Slams Bill Cosby Molestation Rumors: 'Keep Me Out Of This' Thursday, November 20, 2014	“ESSENCE Poll: Would You Continue to Support Your Husband Through Public Scandals?” Thursday, November 20, 2014
Camille Cosby Breaks Silence on Her Husband's Sexual Assault Allegations Monday, December 15, 2014	“Coffee Talk: Dawn Robinson Speaks Out on Being Left Out of En Vogue Movie” Friday, November 21, 2014
Prosecution Could Follow Latest Sexual Assault Allegation Against Bill Cosby Thursday, January 15, 2015	“Coffee Talk: Beyoncé, John Legend Win American Music Awards” Monday, November 24, 2014
Former Hollywood Exec Accuses Bill Cosby of Sexual Assault Tuesday, January 27, 2015	“Bill Cosby's Wife Supports Him "On Every Level," Says Family Friend” Thursday, November 27, 2014

Bill Cosby Speaks on Sexual Assault Allegations Saturday, May 16, 2015	“Bill Cosby Not Welcome At Alma Mater” Friday, November 28, 2014
Bill Cosby’s Attorney Says Victims of Sexual Assault ‘Have Responsibility’ to Come Forward Sunday, August 02, 2015	“Bill Cosby Resigns from Temple University’s Board of Trustees” December 01, 2014
Keshia Knight-Pulliam Explains Why She Didn’t Discuss Sexual Assault Allegations with Bill Cosby Wednesday, October 14, 2015	“Coffee Talk: Bill Cosby Thanks Jill Scott and Whoopi Goldberg for Their Support” Thursday, December 04, 2014
Arrest Warrant Issued for Bill Cosby for Alleged January 2004 Sexual Assault of Andrea Constand Wednesday, December 30, 2015	“Coffee Talk: Bill Cosby Plans to Sue Woman for Extortion” Friday, December 05, 2014
	“Beverly Johnson: Bill Cosby Drugged Me Too” Friday, December 05, 2014
	““Bill Cosby Speaks Out: Black Media Should Stay “Neutral”” Sunday, December 14, 2014
	“Coffee Talk: Spelman Suspends Bill Cosby Professorship”

	Monday, December 15, 2014
	“Whoopi Goldberg Questions Beverly Johnson Over Cosby Allegations” Tuesday, December 16, 2014
	“Bill Cosby’s Daughter: 'He Is the Father You Thought You Knew”’ Tuesday, December 16, 2014
	“‘Black-ish’ Creator Kenya Barris Blasts Director Judd Apatow on His ‘Obsession’ with Bill Cosby” Tuesday, December 30, 2014
	“Keisha Knight Pulliam On Bill Cosby Allegations: 'There Are Two Sides To a Story”’ Monday, January 05, 2015
	“Phylicia Rashad Speaks Out in Defense of On-Screen Husband Bill Cosby” Wednesday, January 07, 2015
	“Coffee Talk: Phylicia Rashad Says She Was Misquoted in Bill Cosby Defense” Thursday, January 08, 2015
	“Vivica A. Fox on Bill Cosby: 'I Stand By Him As Well”’ Thursday, January 08, 2015

	<p>“ESSENCE Poll: What Was the Most Cringe-Worthy Moment of the Golden Globes?”</p> <p>Monday, January 12, 2015</p>
	<p>“Coffee Talk: Is 'Sorority Sisters' Being Canceled?”</p> <p>Wednesday, January 14, 2015</p>
	<p>“Kevin Hart Talks Bill Cosby and "Crossing Over" in New 'Hollywood Reporter' Interview”</p> <p>Thursday, January 15, 2015</p>
	<p>“Coffee Talk: 'Whitney' Brings in Huge Ratings for Lifetime”</p> <p>Tuesday, January 20, 2015</p>
	<p>“Must See: Larry Wilmore Weighs In on Bill Cosby Scandal on 'Nightly Show'”</p> <p>Wednesday, January 21, 2015</p>
	<p>“Malcolm-Jamal Warner on Cosby Allegations: 'It's Painful to Watch'”</p> <p>Wednesday, January 21, 2015</p>
	<p>“Coffee Talk: 'Living Single' Stars Erika Alexander and Kim Coles Team Up for New Webseries”</p> <p>Tuesday, February 10, 2015</p>
	“Jill Scott Is No Longer Defending Bill Cosby”

	Tuesday, July 07, 2015
	“Whoopi Goldberg Pulls Back Bill Cosby Support, Says ‘Information Kinda Points to Guilt’” Tuesday, July 14, 2015
	“Beverly Johnson Would Like to Tell Bill Cosby ‘I Forgive You’” Thursday, September 10, 2015
	“Fordham University Rescinds Bill Cosby’s Honorary Degree” Friday, September 25, 2015
	“3 More Bill Cosby Accusers Come Forward” Thursday, October 01, 2015
	“27 Women To Speak Out Against Bill Cosby On NBC Special” Tuesday, October 06, 2015
	“Keshia Knight-Pulliam on ‘Cosby Show’ Legacy: ‘It’s Going to be Difficult to Take Back Those Memories’” Wednesday, October 07, 2015
	“Judge In Bill Cosby Case Refuses To Dismiss Lawsuit” Thursday, October 08, 2015

	<p>“Tamron Hall To Take Bill Cosby's Place On Temple University's Board Of Trustees.”</p> <p>Thursday, October 08, 2015</p>
	<p>“Eddie Murphy on Why He Wouldn't Portray Bill Cosby on 'SNL': 'There's Nothing Funny About it”</p> <p>Thursday, October 15, 2015</p>
	<p>“Eddie Murphy Riffs on Bill Cosby While Accepting Comedy Award”</p> <p>Monday, October 19, 2015</p>
	<p>“Malcolm Jamal-Warner Compares Bill Cosby to Woody Allen, Roman Polanski”</p> <p>Wednesday, October 21, 2015</p>
	<p>“Bill Cosby Ordered to Give Deposition in Janice Dickinson Defamation Lawsuit”</p> <p>Tuesday, November 03, 2015</p>
	<p>“Court Delays Bill Cosby's Deposition in Janice Dickinson's Defamation Lawsuit”</p> <p>Friday, November 13, 2015</p>
	<p>“Hannibal Buress Talks Cosby Controversy, Calls Himself 'Accidental Whistle-Blower”</p> <p>Monday, November 16, 2015</p>
	<p>“Bill Cosby Files Lawsuit Against Seven</p>

	<p style="text-align: right;">Accusers”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Monday, December 14, 2015</p>
	<p style="text-align: right;">“Kanye West on Twitter: ‘Bill Cosby Innocent!!!!’”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Wednesday, February 10, 2016</p>
	<p style="text-align: right;">“Malcolm Jamal Warner Speaks on Bill Cosby Scandal, Questions Other Hollywood Men Getting a Pass”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Saturday, March 05, 2016</p>

Appendix B

Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines | 30

**TOWSON UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

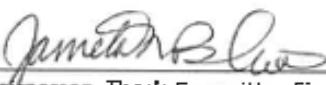
THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

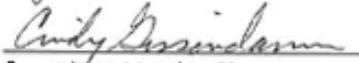
This is to certify that the thesis prepared by [INSERT Student's Name] Ajibola Bakare

[REDACTED] entitled [INSERT Title of Thesis]
Bill Cosby and the African American Media: An Exploration of the
Conversation of Rape and Sexual Assault in the African American Community

[REDACTED]
has been approved by the thesis committee as satisfactorily completing the thesis
requirements for the degree [INSERT Type of Degree] Master of Science

(for example, Master of Science)

	Jameta Barlow	5/12/17
Chairperson, Thesis Committee Signature	Type Name	Date

	Cindy Essendanner	5/12/17
Committee Member Signature	Type Name	Date

	Jennifer Langdon	5/12/17
Committee Member Signature	Type Name	Date

Committee Member Signature	Type Name	Date
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Committee Member Signature	Type Name	Date
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	Janet V. Dehany	5/12/17
Dean of Graduate Studies	Type Name	Date

Ajibola Bakare



EDUCATION

2014-2017

Towson University

Masters of Science in Women and Gender Studies

2009-2013

University of Maryland, College Park

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

April 2015-Present

Towson University – Graduate Research Assistant

Conducted literature search and review, interviewed participants for focus groups, transcribed data, contributing to the writing process for upcoming research article: *Saving our Sisters*

November 2012-July 2013

University of Maryland, College Park – Undergraduate Research Assistant

Responsible for literature search, data entry and checking with SPSS; recruited and ran participants for various research studies

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

April 2016

UD Advanced Institute: Women of Color in the Academy: What's Next? Newark, DE, April 29-May 1st

Using Social Media and Digital Archives to Disrupt, Debunk, and Dismantle Stereotypes in STEM

April 2016

Towson University's 20th Multicultural Conference: Creating the Mosaic, Towson, MD, April 1st
Beyond #CosbyvsCliff: An analysis of the conversation of rape and sexual assault in the Black community

April 2016

SEWSA 2016: Intersectionality in the New Millennium: An Assessment of Culture, Power, and Society, Rock Hill, SC, March 31-April 2nd

An Ode to Mya Hall: TRANSpassing the Boundaries of Social Media

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

August 2013-August 2014

Collier High School

Taught a health course for approximately eight to ten students; worked as a student aide in a civics class and a substitute teacher for various classes; consistently tutored approximately six students to keep them up to date with their courses

August 2012-July 2013

University of Maryland, College Park – Undergraduate Teaching Assistant

Lectured to approximately one hundred and fifty students on domestic violence; Graded papers and administered grades in time with scheduled deadlines; Responded to students questions and inquiries

PUBLICATIONS

Manuscript in Submission

Under revision

Disrupting, Debunking and Dismantling Stereotypes in STEM: An Intersectional and Community Psychological Approach to STEM, Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum (Co-Authors: Dr. Jameta Barlow, Monica Short, Korey Johnson)

