It's Not Always the Stranger in a Dark Alley! An Examination of the Role of Victim-Suspect Relationships and Physical Evidence in Sexual Assault Case Charging Decisions

by

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ABSTRACT

While sexual assault is a crime that frequently occurs, public perceptions tend to greatly differ from the reality of the act. Sexual assault is the most underreported crime in the United States. This is perhaps due to the negative stigma that surrounds victims of sexual assault and the presence of rape myths in society today. Perceptions of sexual assault can vary depending on the relationship between the victim and the offender and the presence of physical evidence, if any, that was collected at the scene of the crime. This study uses data on sex crimes reported to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in 2008, to address the following research questions: How are sexual assault cases prosecuted when the offender is a stranger vs. non-stranger to the victim? Does physical evidence play a role in the charging decisions of stranger vs. non-stranger cases? Data are analyzed using logistic and multinomial regression. Findings show that there is little to no significance among victim-offender relationship and charging decision, but this varies among different evidence types. Implications of this study and areas of future research are discussed.

DEDICATION

To my parents. I would not be able to continue my education without you. Thank you for supporting me and encouraging me to follow my dreams.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The phrase ‘sexual assault’ is typically used as an umbrella term for any form of sexual contact between a victim and a perpetrator without the victim’s consent. While rape is commonly associated with the phrase, sexual assault can occur in a multitude of ways. Forms of sexual assault can include unwanted touching or fondling, forcing an individual to perform sexual acts, attempted rape, or penetration of an individual’s body—also known as rape (RAINN, 2024). Sexual assault is the most under-reported crime in the United States. 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to authorities, and this statistic is much lower for cases of child sexual abuse, at only 12% (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). Sexual assault and its frequency can be difficult to accurately measure due to the nature of the crime. Sexual assault often occurs in private where there are few if any witnesses, and even if witnesses are present and able to corroborate the allegations, authorities rely on the presence of physical evidence to determine the credibility of the individual choosing to report (Alderden et al., 2021; McLean & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008; Menaker et al., 2017).

There is a plethora of reasons why victims who have been sexually assaulted choose not to report. Victims may have feelings of fear, shame, or guilt surrounding their assault (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2016). Victims may choose not to report their assault due to the fear that they could be attacked again if their rapist discovers that they have spoken about it (Ahrens, 2006; Carbone-Lopez et al., 2016; Johnson & Lewis; 2023). Sexual assaults also frequently occur between victims and offenders who have some kind of existing relationship between one another at the time of the assault, and it is common for

victims to realize that they were assaulted after-the-fact—choosing not to report in order to protect themselves and the offender (Johnson & Lewis, 2023). Victims in this scenario may feel that their assault was not valid or worth reporting to police due to their existing relationship with their rapist, especially in cases where the victim would not consider their assault to be violent (Ceelen et al., 2019).

There tends to be a negative connotation connected to being a victim/survivor of sexual assault. Instead of recognizing the strength that comes from surviving a traumatic situation, many victims of rape experience shame due to the negative stigma of sexual assault in today's society, as well as the prevalence of rape myths. Victims who do choose to speak about their assault are often confronted with questions regarding the clothing they were wearing at the time of the assault, if they were intoxicated, and who they were surrounding themselves with. Questions such as these take the blame away from the individual who chose to sexually assault another human being, instead placing it on the individual who was assaulted. Research suggests that rape myths are enforced by both the general public and members of law enforcement such as police officers, making it difficult for victims to feel like they are being supported if they choose to report their assault (Hockett et al., 2015; Parratt & Pina, 2017).

The presence of physical evidence can affect both police and prosecutor decision making in cases of sexual assault. This can cause further stress to victims, as they are expected to care for themselves while simultaneously providing the most accurate information to authorities and medical examiners if they do choose to report. Corrigan (2013) argued that forensic medical exams impose a demand on rape victims that is unlike those that are required of any other type of criminal complainant. Police often take

the cases of those who choose to receive a forensic medical exam more seriously than those who do not, promoting the idea that going through a long, invasive medical exam is an indicator of a victim's credibility (Franklin et al., 2023). While the collection of physical evidence can take a toll on victims both mentally and physically, the presence of physical evidence can be especially helpful in identifying suspects when a victim does not fully remember the details of an assault, perhaps due to trauma they may have faced or due to being given substances by their assailant. Prior research has identified that forensic medical exams can create investigative leads, leading authorities to potentially collect more of other types of evidence and to refer cases for prosecution more frequently (Campbell et al., 2012; Tiry et al., 2022). While physical evidence can be beneficial to both victims and police in the investigative process, its role in leading to charges being filed can vary. Studies such as Campbell et al. (2014) and Campbell et al. (2012) have discovered that evidence collected from rape kits can lead to increased prosecution rates and case progression, but others have concluded that forensic or physical evidence does not significantly impact case progression (Alderden et al., 2012; Beichner & Spohn, 2005; Tiry et al., 2022).

Despite its prevalence, sexual assault is often misconstrued by the general public as a crime that is typically committed by strangers, against strangers. Often in television and media, sexual assault is a crime that is depicted as an unknown man attacking a vulnerable woman in a dark alley (Klement et al., 2019). What the media and rape myths today neglect to report or consider is that a majority of sexual assaults occur among intimate partners or individuals who already had some form of existing relationship—such as dating partners, spouses or ex-spouses, relatives, doctors, teachers, or other

figures of authority (Ullman et al., 2006). Approximately 1 in 10 women in the United States have been raped by an intimate partner, with nearly 17% of women reporting that they have experienced some form of sexual violence other than rape by an intimate partner at some point in their lives (CDC, 2010). While intimate partner sexual assault occurs more frequently than stranger sexual assault, assaults committed by strangers tend to be viewed more seriously by both police and prosecutors (Spohn & Tellis, 2019). Though investigations are often conducted more thoroughly by investigators in cases of sexual assault committed by strangers, research is mixed regarding whether cases of stranger sexual assault are prosecuted more frequently or severely than cases of intimate partner sexual assault. In the interest of assessing how cases of sexual assault are charged depending on the relationship between the victim and the offender, the current study aims to answer the following research questions: How are sexual assault cases prosecuted when the offender is a stranger vs. non-stranger to the victim? Does physical evidence play a role in the charging decisions of stranger vs. non-stranger cases? Additionally, analysis of risk-taking factors and victim character traits will be conducted in the study of charging decisions in an effort to challenge rape myths surrounding victim behavior.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual Assault and the Anti-Rape Movement

The act of sexual assault is not a new crime. In the 1800s, common law rape was defined as "carnal knowledge of a woman 10 years or older, forcibly and against her will" (Bishop, 2019). Advocates of women's suffrage and temperance during this time period pushed to raise the age of consent from age 10 to between 14 and 18, according to state laws. Young girls were often regarded as women and were taken advantage of before even experiencing puberty. Rape was a common occurrence, and even more dangerous for women and young girls of color. During a time period where slavery was still legal and in practice, women who tried to defend themselves against their rapist were often abused and beaten (Bishop, 2019). When the Anti-Rape movement came about in the 1960s and 1970s during the feminist movement in the United States, acts such as marital rape were finally beginning to be seen as an issue. Light was being shone on the idea that rape is an act of violence against and a mechanism of control over women. Traditional rape laws at the time placed blame on the victim, often judging them by their sexual history or if they were able to physically resist their attacker at the time of the assault, but the rape reform movement emerged in an effort to ensure that rape was taken as seriously as other violent offenses and to shift the blame from the victim to the offender (Horney & Spohn, 1996; Spohn, 2020; Spohn, 1999; Spohn & Horney, 1993).

Prior to the Anti-Rape movement, rape was defined as a crime that is committed against a woman. The definition of rape was limited to only penile-vaginal penetration, essentially excluding male victims and other acts of sexual violence (Spohn, 1999). Early

advocates for rape law reform believed that expanding the definition of rape to make it more gender-neutral, as well as discussing the presence of other forms of sexual assault, would shift the narrative to make arrest, conviction, and incarceration a more likely occurrence (Spohn & Horney, 1993). Many feminist and legal scholars argue that despite the reform laws of the Anti-Rape movement, men who rape are less likely to be convicted, and if convicted, they receive less severe sentences than they would for other violent crimes (Kingsnorth et al., 1999; Spohn & Horney, 1993).

One of the many glaring issues fought by feminists during the rape reform movement was a change in laws on marital rape. As recently as three decades ago, husbands could legally sexually assault their wives. Marital rape was not considered a crime in all fifty states of the United States until July 5, 1993, with Oklahoma and North Carolina being the last two states to declare it a crime under at least one section of their sexual offense codes (Bergen & Barnhill, 2006). While many survivors of sexual assault feel shame and fear discussing what has happened to them, many women who experience marital rape and other forms of sexual assault within their marriage choose not to report because they do not want to feel judged by their family members or friends, or due to a belief that their assault was not actually an assault because it was committed by their partner. Approximately 1 in 3 women report having experienced some form of assault (i.e., rape, stalking, physical violence) by an intimate partner in their lifetime (CDC, 2010). Authorities such as police officers and prosecutors contribute to the stigma in the selection of cases that they choose to prosecute. In a study conducted by Spohn & Tellis (2011), it was concluded that there is substantial attrition in rape cases that are reported to authorities. The authors found that from 2005 to 2009, 5,031 cases of rape and attempted

rape had been reported to the Los Angeles Police Department. Only 11.7% of these cases ended in the arrest of a suspect, 9.7% ended in charges filed against a suspect, and 7.8% ended with a suspect being convicted (Spohn, 2020; Spohn & Tellis, 2011). Many individuals who are victims of sexual assault, especially those who have been assaulted by an intimate partner, may believe that they will not be taken seriously by law enforcement because of their existing relationship with their rapist.

Victim-Suspect Relationship Influence on Charging Decisions

Prior research suggests that the relationship between victim and suspect is an important factor in the decision-making process of charging cases of sexual assault. Assaults that were committed by strangers tend to be perceived as more serious by prosecutors, making them less likely to drop a case involving strangers than one involving victim-suspects who had a prior relationship (Spohn et al., 2001; Spohn & Tellis, 2019). This phenomenon was explored by Ullman et al. (2006), in which a mail survey of 1,000 female sexual assault survivors was conducted. It was discovered that strangers are perceived to be a bigger threat by victims, and these assaults are considered to be more violent and severe. Studies such as Holmstrom & Burgess (1978) suggest that law enforcement officers often do not treat non-stranger rape as "real" rape. The popular "stranger-danger" stereotype paints strangers to be more threatening to women due to the prospect of their chastity being violated, and police further reinforce this idea by showing more concern for sexual assault cases in which the perpetrator was a stranger (Franklin et al., 2023).

While sexual assault is traumatizing enough, many scholars argue that law enforcement officers can contribute to victim's "second rape" by asking invasive

questions about their assault and questioning their credibility (Franklin et al., 2023; O'Neal & Spohn, 2016). Spohn & Holleran (2001) conducted a study analyzing sexual assault case data from Kansas City and Philadelphia. It was found that in sexual assault cases involving intimate partners or acquaintances, prosecutors were less likely to file charges if they questioned the victim's credibility or behavior at the time of the assault. In cases involving strangers, the reputation and behavior of the victim did not influence charging decisions. In cases of sexual assault committed by strangers, charges were more likely to be filed by prosecutors if a weapon such as a gun or knife was used, or if the victim was White (Spohn & Holleran, 2001). In Black's Theory of the Behavior of the Law, it is argued that the closer the relationship is between the victim and the offender, the less likely it is that the assault will be reported (Ylang & Holtfreter, 2020).

Prosecution & Physical Evidence

While many cases of sexual assault go unreported, victims also choose not to seek medical help after experiencing an assault for similar reasons that they do not speak with law enforcement – shame. Despite this, research has shown that individuals who do seek help and receive medical exams such as SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) exams tend to file police reports, which can lead to cases being more likely to result in an arrest or conviction (Solola et al., 1983). The most commonly available types of evidence found in sexual assault cases include biological evidence (e.g., semen), but also fingerprints, impressions (e.g., footprints from shoes), and trace evidence (e.g., hairs or fibers from clothing) (California Department of Justice, 2011). Research on the probative value of physical evidence types such as DNA varies. When forensic evidence is collected by investigators from a crime scene, it often goes unanalyzed. Sexual assault kits, often

containing materials like blood, saliva, or semen, tend to be neglected by law enforcement officials once the evidence is collected. This has been revealed in a number of police agency surveys and crime labs (Menaker et al., 2017). While forensic evidence can be helpful in identifying strangers, it often has little value in cases of intimate partner, family, or acquaintance rapes because the suspect is known, and the suspect may claim that the assault was consensual (Gaensslen & Lee, 2001; Menaker et al., 2017). In a study conducted by Alderden et al. (2021), it was found that prosecutors were more likely to support a victim's credibility if they had received a forensic medical examination. Prosecutors also deemed DNA evidence helpful in cases where victims were too traumatized to discuss the assault, too young to identify assailants, or when they were incapacitated (Alderden et al., 2021).

CHAPTER 3

DATA & METHODS

Data

This quantitative study consists of sex crime data collected from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD). From both LAPD and LASD, data were obtained on all sex crimes that involved victims over the age of 12 that were reported in 2008. Additional data was obtained from the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office for cases that resulted in the arrest of an adult suspect. Complete case files were gathered for all sexual assaults that were reported in the year 2008 from each agency. Any identifying information that could specify the victim, suspect(s), witness(es), or law enforcement officials was redacted from each case file by the LAPD and LASD.

The primary focus of this study is to analyze how the relationship between the victim and the suspect and the presence of physical evidence affect charging decisions in sexual assault cases. The sample consists of cases involving victims over the age of 12 that were reported to the two law enforcement agencies in 2008. While some suspects were arrested and charged, others had their cases dropped by the Los Angeles District Attorney prior to being arrested, or after being arrested. For the purpose of this study, a charging decision represents the decision of the district attorney (whether that was to file charges, reject a case prior to an arrest, or reject a case after an arrest) – and not strictly an arrest. The original sample consisted of 649 cases, including cases that were unfounded, cases in which the investigation was continuing, and cases that were cleared

exceptionally. These 269 cases were removed, leaving 382 cases which were referred to the prosecutor for a charging decision.

Variables

Dependent Variable: Charging Decision

The dependent variable of this study was the decision to file or reject charges. For the sake of this study, charging was analyzed in two ways. The first is a dichotomous measure, indicating 1 = charges were filed, and 0 = charges were not filed and the second is a three-category variable, indicating 1 = district attorney rejected the case prior to the arrest of a suspect, 2 = district attorney rejected the case after the arrest of a suspect, and 3 = district attorney filed charges.. Binary logistic regression was used to analyze the dichotomous measure of charging and multinomial logistic regression was used to analyze the three-category measure of charging.

Main Independent Variable: Victim-Defendant Relationship

The original sample included relationship variables for cases with one suspect and cases that included multiple suspects. Due to a small number of cases involving multiple suspects, cases with one suspect were the focus of this study. In the sample of 382 cases, 349 cases involved one suspect, making up about 91% of the sample. Victim-suspect relationships found in this data include strangers, coworkers, members of authority such as teachers, doctors, or coaches, relatives, parents, neighbors, roommates, fathers of victims' children, those who were divorced or legally separated, those who were married or domestic partners, those who were formerly dating or in an intimate relationship, those who were dating or currently in an intimate relationship, those who were on a first date, those who met online, friends, casual acquaintances, and recent acquaintances. For this

study, a new variable was created to consolidate victim-suspect relationships into one of three categories: (1) strangers, (2) intimate partners, or (3) other relationships. Table 1 shows how each relationship was coded.

Table 1: Relationship Coding

Existing Relationship	Category Coding
Stranger	1
Coworker	3
Authority: Teacher, Doctor, Coach	3
Relative of Victim	3
Parent of Victim	3
Neighbor	3
Cohabiting/Roommate	3
Father of Victim's Children	2
Divorced	2
Legally Separated	2
Married	2
Domestic Partner	2
Former Intimate Partner/Dating	2
Intimate Partner/Dating	2
Planned First Meeting/Date	3
Internet Relationship	2
Friend/Not Romantic	3
Casual Acquaintance	3
Recent Acquaintance	3

Independent Variable: Physical Evidence

Evidence was an important point of analysis in this study. Evidence was examined in three ways in the analysis. The first measure is a dichotomous variable in which 0 = no physical evidence and 1 = some physical evidence. Second, evidence was measured as a variety score of each type of physical evidence. This variable was formed by combining the total number of different physical evidence types: Blood, Hair, Skin, Clothes/Bedding, Semen, and Vehicle License Plate into one score of evidence. Third, evidence was measured by analyzing each of the six types of physical evidence individually.

Control Variables

Multiple controls were selected for this study in an attempt to account for unique victim characteristics. All models included controls for the race and age of both victim and suspect. This study also included indicators of victim risk-taking behaviors due to the prevalence of rape myths and stigma in today's society, in an attempt to determine if these have an effect on whether or not a case is charged. Risk-taking behaviors include walking alone, riding in a car with the suspect, entering the suspect's residence, inviting the suspect into their home, being in a bar alone, being in an area known for drugs, drinking alcohol, being drunk, taking illegal drugs, and passing out (non-drug related). Furthermore, character traits that could lead law enforcement officials to question the victim's credibility were also analyzed. These include having a pattern of alcohol use, having a pattern of drug use, having a disreputable job, working as a prostitute, having a prior criminal record, having a mental illness, and being a current or former gang member.

Additional controls were included that were more case-specific, including whether the victim cooperated with authorities at the time of suspect arrest, whether the victim filed a prompt report (within one hour of the assault), whether the case was considered a rape (as opposed to an attempted rape), whether the victim resisted the suspect during the assault, whether the victim was injured by the suspect, whether the victim received a SART Exam (an examination done by a sexual assault response team that both provides medical care to the victim and collects evidence that could be relevant to case prosecution), whether a weapon was used in the assault, if the victim had a motive to lie to authorities, if the victim was physically assaulted by the suspect, the number of witnesses to the assault, and the agency to which the assault was reported (either Los Angeles Police Department or Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables in the analysis. Due to this analysis specifically focusing on charging outcomes, cases in which the district attorney rejected the case prior to arrest, rejected the case after arrest, and cases in which charges were filed were included in the sample. In about 32% of the cases, the prosecutor filed charges. Charges were rejected prior to arrest in 38.74% of cases and were rejected after arrest in 29.58% of cases. The relationship status between victim and suspect varied in this sample. In 15% of cases, the suspect was a stranger to the victim. In 36% of cases, the victim and suspect were intimate partners in some form. In 49% of cases, the victim and suspect had some "other" type of relationship.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dependent Variables			
Charged	382	0.32	0.47
Charging Decision	382	1.93	0.84
DA Reject Prior to Arrest	148	38.74	---
DA Reject After Arrest	113	29.58	---
DA Filed Charges	121	31.68	---
Independent Variables			
Relationship	382	2.34	0.73
Stranger	59	15.45	---
Intimate Partner	136	35.60	---
Other Relationship	187	48.95	---
Evidence			
Physical Evidence	207	0.54	0.50
Evidence Variety Score	346	6.77	3.86
Blood	19	0.05	0.22
Hair	48	0.13	0.33
Skin	20	0.05	0.22
Clothes/Bedding	195	0.51	0.50
Semen	48	0.17	0.72
Vehicle License Plate	16	0.05	0.22
Control Variables			
Risky Behaviors	382	0.35	0.48
Questionable Character Traits	382	0.14	0.34
Victim Cooperation	382	3.94	3.61
Prompt Reporting	382	0.23	0.42
Rape Case	382	0.86	0.34
Victim Resistance Against Suspect	382	1.95	1.24
Victim Injury	382	0.54	0.50
Victim Received SART Exam	382	0.65	0.56
Weapon Involved	382	1.51	1.28
Victim Had Motive to Lie	382	0.14	0.34
Physical Assault	382	0.55	0.50
Number of Witnesses	382	0.94	1.50
Victim Age	374	26.36	11.73
Suspect Age	382	32.66	12.88

Victim Race	373	2.80	1.04
Asian American	17	4.56	---
Hispanic	187	50.13	---
White	93	24.93	---
Suspect Race	375	2.65	1.09
Asian American	10	2.67	---
Hispanic	195	52.00	---
White	68	18.13	---
Other Race	4	1.07	---
Law Enforcement Agency	382	0.33	0.47
LAPD	125	32.72	---
LASD	257	67.28	---

Charging decisions in this analysis were analyzed based on the presence of physical evidence and characteristics related to victim behavior. There was some type of physical evidence in 54% of cases and victims received a SART Exam immediately following their assault in 65% of the cases. In terms of victim behavior and character, 35% of the victims were classified as engaging in risky behaviors, 14% had traits or engaged in behaviors that could lead investigators or law enforcement officials to question their credibility, and 14% had a motive to lie. A large majority of cases (86%) were classified as rape, 54% of victims reported being injured in their assault, 55% reported that they were physically assaulted, and 23% reported their assault to authorities promptly (within 1 hour of the assault occurring). About a third (33%) of cases were reported to LAPD and 67% were reported to LASD.

Demographic characteristics among victims and suspects varied across cases, but all victims in this sample were female and all suspects were male. The average age of victim in this sample was 26 years old, while the average age of suspect was 32 years old. In terms of the victim's race/ethnicity. 20% were African American. 5% were Asian American, 50% were Hispanic/Latino, and 25% were White. As for suspects, 26% were African American, 3% of suspects Asian American. 52% were Hispanic/Latino, and 18% were White; 1% of suspects identified as 'Other.'

Logistic Regression Models

Table 3 presents the logistic regression results for Model 1, which includes the dichotomous physical evidence variable, Model 2, which include the evidence variety score, and Model 3, which includes the individual types of physical evidence. **Beginning with the results shown in** Model 1, the presence of physical evidence was not found to

be a significant predictor of a case being charged (b = 0.28, p = 0.379). Additionally, compared with strangers, defendants with other relationships to the victim did not have statistically significant differences in the probability to be charged. Prosecutors were less likely to file charges in cases in which the victim engaged in risky behaviors (b = -0.72, p = 0.024) or had character/credibility concerns (b = -0.97, p = 0.043). The likelihood of charging significantly decreased with the age of the victim (b = -0.04, p = 0.013). Cases in which the victim cooperated with authorities after an arrest was made (b = -0.18, p = 0.000) or in which the victim was deemed to have a motivation to lie (b = -1.28, p = 0.016) were significantly less likely to result in charges.

Table 3: Logistic Regression

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Physical Evidence (Y/N)	Evidence Variety Score	Types of Physical Evidence
Relationship			
Intimate Partners	-0.71	-0.70	-0.83
	(0.44)	(0.44)	(0.46)
Other Relationships	-0.67	-0.59	-0.62
	(0.40)	(0.41)	(0.42)
Evidence Type			
Physical Evidence (Y/N)	0.28		
	(0.32)		
Evidence Variety Score		0.21	
		(0.14)	
Blood			1.02
			(0.62)
Hair			-0.60
			(0.45)
Skin			0.39
			(0.60)
Clothes/Bedding			0.13
			(0.35)
Semen			0.56
			(0.42)
Vehicle License Plate			0.41
			(0.64)
Control Variables			
Risky Behaviors	-0.72*	-0.75*	-0.83*
	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.34)
Questionable Character Traits	-0.97*	-0.95*	-0.90
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.49)
Victim Age	-0.04*	-0.04*	-0.03*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Suspect Age	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Victim Race			
Asian American	-1.45	-1.42	-1.46
	(0.87)	(0.88)	(0.91)
Hispanic	-0.01	0.08	-0.03
	(0.50)	(0.51)	(0.52)
White	-0.82	-0.73	-0.87
	(0.52)	(0.52)	(0.53)
Suspect Race			
Asian American	1.36	1.45	1.46
	(0.92)	(0.93)	(0.93)
Hispanic	0.11	0.13	0.19
	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.48)
White	0.88	0.91	1.00
	(0.53)	(0.53)	(0.55)
Other Race	-0.32	-0.22	-0.23
	(1.36)	(1.35)	(1.35)
Victim Cooperation	-0.18***	-0.18***	-0.18***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Prompt Reporting	0.55	0.57	0.60
	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)
Rape Case	-0.48	-0.50	-0.34
	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.43)
Victim Resistance Against Suspect	0.19	0.21	0.25*
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Victim Injury	0.41	0.41	0.45
	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.31)
Victim Received SART Exam	-0.30	-0.34	-0.31
	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.31)
Weapon Involved	0.06	0.06	0.05
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Victim Had Motive to Lie	-1.28*	-1.27*	-1.30*
	(0.54)	(0.54)	(0.55)
Physical Assault	-0.61	-0.66*	-0.70*
	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.32)
Number of Witnesses	0.04	0.04	0.03
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Law Enforcement Agency	0.10	0.12	-0.04
	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.32)
Constant	1.66	1.45	1.41
	(0.85)	(0.86)	(0.87)
Observations	367	363	363
Standard errors in parentheses			
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05			

In Model 2, evidence was included as a variety score of each type of physical evidence accounted for by authorities. Similarly to Model 1, no relationships were found to be significant in predicting whether a case would be charged, and evidence was once again not a significant predictor of a case being charged. Prosecutors were significantly less likely to charge defendants whose victims engaged in risk-taking behaviors (b = -0.75, p = 0.025), and had questionable character traits (b = -0.95, p = 0.045). Similarly to Model 1, the chance of a defendant being charged significantly decreased with victim age (b = -0.04, p = 0.014). Additionally, defendants whose victims cooperated with authorities after an arrest (b = -0.18, p = 0.000) were significantly less likely to be charged.

In Model 3, evidence was included by indicating each physical evidence type. No relationships were found to be significant predictors of a defendant being charged. Similarly to Models 1 and 2, prosecutors were less likely to charge defendants whose victims engaged in risk-taking behaviors (b = -0.83, p = 0.019), but unlike Models 1 and 2, victims with character concerns were not a significant predictor of a defendant's likelihood to be charged. Victim age (b = -0.03, p = 0.020) was again significant in Model 3, indicating that defendants with older victims were significantly less likely to be charged. Similarly to Models 1 and 2, prosecutors were significantly less likely to charge defendants whose victims cooperated with authorities after an arrest was made (b = -0.18, p = 0.000). Defendants whose victims had a motive to lie (b = -1.30, p = 0.017) and defendants who physically assaulted their victim (b = -0.70, p = 0.026) were significantly less likely to be charged than their respective counterparts.

Multinomial Regression Models

Table 4: Multinomial Regression

	(1) Physical Evidence (Y/N)		(2) Evidence Variety Score		(3) Types of Physical Evidence	
	DA Rejected Case **Prior** to Arrest	DA Rejected Case **After** Arrest	DA Rejected Case **Prior** to Arrest	DA Rejected Case **After** Arrest	DA Rejected Case **Prior** to Arrest	DA Rejected Case **After** Arrest
Relationship						
Intimate Partners	0.74	0.80	0.70	0.85	0.93	0.88
	(0.71)	(0.50)	(0.70)	(0.50)	(0.75)	(0.52)
Other Relationships	1.16	0.36	1.03	0.37	1.13	0.24
	(0.66)	(0.47)	(0.65)	(0.46)	(0.67)	(0.48)
Evidence Type						
Physical Evidence (Y/N)	-1.07*	0.15				
	(0.48)	(0.38)				
Evidence Variety Score			-0.56*	-0.12		
			(0.25)	(0.16)		
Blood					-1.41	-0.94
					(1.10)	(0.75)
Hair					0.86	0.51
					(0.70)	(0.49)
Skin					-0.61	-0.57
					(1.28)	(0.66)
Clothes/Bedding					-0.84	0.33
					(0.52)	(0.42)
Semen					-1.45*	-0.37
					(0.74)	(0.47)
Vehicle License Plate					0.18	-1.09
					(1.14)	(0.81)
Control Variables						
Risky Behaviors	1.47**	0.48	1.56**	0.55	1.78**	0.60
	(0.52)	(0.37)	(0.53)	(0.37)	(0.57)	(0.38)
Questionable Character Traits	0.67	1.11*	0.62	1.11*	0.52	1.04
	(0.67)	(0.53)	(0.67)	(0.53)	(0.71)	(0.54)
Victim Age	0.03	0.04**	0.03	0.04**	0.02	0.04*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Suspect Age	0.01	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.02	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Victim Race						
Asian American	2.62	0.71	2.68	0.70	2.64	0.78
	(1.48)	(0.95)	(1.47)	(0.96)	(1.53)	(0.99)
Hispanic	0.76	-0.39	0.80	-0.53	1.05	-0.46
	(0.80)	(0.57)	(0.81)	(0.58)	(0.88)	(0.59)
White	1.25	0.74	1.23	0.64	1.53	0.68
	(0.85)	(0.58)	(0.86)	(0.58)	(0.93)	(0.61)
Suspect Race						
Asian American	-1.33	-1.43	-1.45	-1.50	-1.36	-1.62
	(1.59)	(1.02)	(1.56)	(1.04)	(1.59)	(1.04)
Hispanic	-1.47	0.42	-1.53*	0.42	-1.85*	0.41
	(0.77)	(0.52)	(0.77)	(0.53)	(0.84)	(0.54)
White	-1.56	-0.90	-1.65	-0.92	-1.87*	-1.00
	(0.88)	(0.62)	(0.86)	(0.62)	(0.94)	(0.64)
Other Race	-0.11	0.41	-0.07	0.36	0.14	0.15
	(2.39)	(1.47)	(2.31)	(1.46)	(2.60)	(1.48)
Victim Cooperation	0.56***	-0.24**	0.55***	-0.24***	0.57***	-0.25***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Prompt Reporting	-2.23***	-0.15	-2.15***	-0.16	-2.23**	-0.18
	(0.66)	(0.36)	(0.65)	(0.36)	(0.68)	(0.37)
Rape Case	0.57	0.30	0.58	0.40	0.45	0.16
	(0.75)	(0.46)	(0.74)	(0.46)	(0.77)	(0.48)
Victim Resistance Against Suspect	-0.36*	-0.10	-0.38*	-0.12	-0.39*	-0.15
	(0.18)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.13)	(0.19)	(0.14)
Victim Injury	-0.46	-0.53	-0.50	-0.47	-0.51	-0.61
	(0.46)	(0.36)	(0.46)	(0.35)	(0.47)	(0.37)
Victim Received SART Exam	0.78	0.19	0.71	0.32	0.73	0.22
	(0.46)	(0.34)	(0.46)	(0.33)	(0.47)	(0.35)
Weapon Involved	-0.13	-0.00	-0.12	0.00	-0.14	0.02
	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.12)
Victim Had Motive to Lie	1.03	1.66**	1.02	1.59**	1.02	1.66**
	(0.73)	(0.59)	(0.73)	(0.59)	(0.76)	(0.60)
Physical Assault	0.73	0.60	0.81	0.63	0.88	0.72
	(0.48)	(0.36)	(0.48)	(0.36)	(0.50)	(0.38)
Number of Witnesses	-0.16	0.00	-0.14	0.01	-0.14	0.01
	(0.16)	(0.09)	(0.16)	(0.09)	(0.16)	(0.10)
Law Enforcement Agency	0.19	-0.64	0.19	-0.64	0.38	-0.51
	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.50)	(0.38)
Constant	-4.31**	-1.40	-4.21**	-1.29	-4.29**	-1.06
	(1.42)	(0.95)	(1.42)	(0.96)	(1.48)	(0.98)
Observations	367	367	363	363	363	363
Standard errors in parentheses						
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05						

Table 4 presents the multinomial regression for the district attorney's decision to reject a case prior to an arrest or after an arrest, compared to the district attorney's decision to file charges as the reference group. Model 1 represents physical evidence (Yes/No), Model 2 represents the evidence variety score, and Model 3 represents each individual type of physical evidence. In Model 1, no statistically significant relationship was observed between victim-defendant relationship for either of the two comparisons (i.e., between rejection prior to arrest and charged, and between rejection after arrest and charged). If physical evidence was present, defendants had a lower chance of pre-arrest rejection relative to charged (*RRR* = 0.342, $p = 0.027$), but had a slightly higher (and non-significant) chance of post-arrest rejection relative to charged (*RRR* = 1.17, $p = 0.687$). Defendants whose victim engaged in risky behaviors were significantly more likely to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to charged (*RRR* = 4.34, $p = 0.005$), and were more likely (but non-significant) to have a post-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 1.61, $p = .0.196$).

To the contrary, defendants whose victims had character concerns were significantly more likely to have a post-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 1.96, $p = 0.035$), but not significantly more likely to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 3.04, $p = 0.314$). If victims cooperated with authorities, defendants had a significantly higher chance of pre-arrest rejection relative to charged (*RRR* = 1.76, $p = 0.000$), but had a significantly lower chance of post-arrest rejection relative to charged (*RRR* = 0.78, $p = 0.001$). Defendants whose victim filed a prompt report were significantly less likely to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 0.11, $p = 0.001$), as well as less likely (but non-significant) to have a post-arrest rejection

relative to being charged (*RRR* = 0.86, *p* = 0.681). Defendants whose victims resisted against them during an assault were significantly less likely to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 0.70, *p* = 0.042), and less likely (but non-significant) to have a post-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 0.90, *p* = 0.442). If the victim was deemed as having motivation to lie, defendants were significantly more likely to have a post-arrest rejection relative to charged (*RRR* = 5.28, *p* = 0.005), as well as more likely (but non-significant) to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 2.80, *p* = 0.157).

Model 2 represents evidence as a variety score of each type of physical evidence accounted for by authorities. No relationships were found to be a significant predictor of a defendant having a pre or post-arrest rejection relative to being charged. If physical evidence was present, defendants were significantly less likely to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 1.10, *p* = 0.05) as well as less likely (but non-significant) to have a post-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 1.05, *p* = 0.240). Similarly to Model 1, defendants whose victims engaged in risk-taking behaviors (*RRR* = 3.29, *p* = 0.020), cooperated with authorities (*RRR* = 1.79, *p* = 0.000), filed a prompt report (*RRR* = 0.12, *p* = 0.001), resisted against defendant during the assault (*RRR* = 0.63, p = 0.013), and had a motive to lie about the assault (*RRR* = 5.67, *p* = 0.004) were all significantly more or less likely to have a pre or post-arrest rejection relative to being charged.

Model 3 represents evidence by examining each individual type of physical evidence. Following the pattern of Models 1 and 2, Model 3 showed no relationships that significantly impacted whether a defendant would have a pre or post-arrest rejection

relative to being charged. In cases where semen was collected by authorities, defendants were significantly less likely to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 0.16, $p = 0.018$), and less likely (but non-significant) to have a post-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 0.68, $p = 0.411$). No other types of physical evidence were shown to significantly impact whether a defendant had a pre or post-arrest rejection relative to being charged. Similarly to Models 1 and 2, defendants whose victims engaged in risk-taking behaviors (*RRR* = 5.83, $p = 0.003$), cooperated with authorities (*RRR* = 1.83, $p = 0.000$), filed a prompt report (*RRR* = 0.10, $p = 0.001$), resisted against defendant during the assault (*RRR* = 0.62, $p = 0.015$), and had a motive to lie about the assault (*RRR* = 5.21, $p = 0.007$) were all significantly more or less likely to have a pre or post-arrest rejection relative to being charged. Unlike other models, Model 3 shows that White defendants are significantly less likely to have a pre-arrest rejection relative to being charged (*RRR* = 0.16, $p = 0.05$).

Logistic Interaction Models

Table 5: Interactions Between Relationship Status and Evidence Types

	(1) Physical Evidence (Y/N)	(2) Evidence Variety Score	(3) Types of Physical Evidence
Relationship			
Intimate Partners	-0.76	-0.13	-1.17
	(0.65)	(1.13)	(0.68)
Other Relationships	-0.20	0.26	-0.36
	(0.68)	(1.05)	(0.71)
Relationship x Type of Evidence			
Physical Evidence (Y/N)	0.51		
	(0.71)		
Intimate Partner x Physical Evidence	0.17		
	(0.81)		
Other Relationship x Physical Evidence	-0.67		
	(0.82)		
Evidence Variety Score		0.23	
		(0.14)	
Intimate Partner x Evidence Variety Score		-0.14	
		(0.80)	
Blood			2.69
			(2.03)
Intimate Partner x Blood			-1.17
			(2.30)
Other Relationship x Blood			-2.36
			(2.25)
Hair			-0.85
			(1.05)
Intimate Partner x Hair			-0.04
			(1.39)
Other Relationship x Hair			0.54
			(1.22)
Skin			-0.87
			(1.29)
Intimate Partner x Skin			-1.05
			(2.00)
Other Relationship x Skin			2.74
			(1.58)
Clothes/Bedding			1.00
			(0.82)
Intimate Partner x Clothes/Bedding			-0.16
			(0.95)
Other Relationship x Clothes/Bedding			-1.35
			(0.96)
Semen			-0.56
			(1.01)
Intimate Partner x Semen			1.88
			(1.33)
Other Relationship x Semen			1.62
			(1.18)
Vehicle License Plate			0.04
			(1.05)
Control Variables			
Risky Behaviors	-0.66*	-0.58	-0.91*
	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.36)
Questionable Character Traits	-0.95*	-0.87	-1.08*
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.51)
Victim Age	-0.04*	-0.04**	-0.03*
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Suspect Age	-0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Victim Race			
Asian American	-1.49	-1.13	-1.73
	(0.88)	(0.90)	(0.98)
Hispanic	-0.02	0.26	0.16
	(0.50)	(0.51)	(0.54)
White	-0.85	-0.54	-0.80
	(0.52)	(0.53)	(0.55)
Suspect Race			
Asian American	1.29	0.97	1.56
	(0.92)	(0.96)	(0.96)
Hispanic	0.11	-0.08	0.10
	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.50)
White	0.91	0.72	0.99
	(0.54)	(0.53)	(0.57)
Other Race	-0.17	-0.04	-0.05
	(1.36)	(1.33)	(1.35)
Victim Cooperation	-0.19***	-0.18***	-0.18***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Prompt Reporting	0.60	0.66*	0.38
	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.37)
Rape Case	-0.53	-0.60	-0.51
	(0.43)	(0.42)	(0.45)
Victim Resistance Against Suspect	0.20	0.20	0.28*
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
Victim Injury	0.47	0.42	0.52
	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.33)
Victim Received SART Exam	-0.29	-0.40	-0.29
	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.31)
Weapon Involved	0.06	0.04	0.04
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Victim Had Motive to Lie	-1.37*	-1.29*	-1.34*
	(0.54)	(0.54)	(0.56)
Physical Assault	-0.64*	-0.68*	-0.76*
	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.34)
Number of Witnesses	0.03	0.03	0.03
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Law Enforcement Agency	0.07	0.15	0.04
	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.34)
Constant	1.56	1.03	1.43
	(0.93)	(0.77)	(1.01)
Observations	367	361	355

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 5 shows the logistic interactions between relationship and evidence types. As with the previous set of logistic models, Model 1 presents evidence as a dichotomous measure of physical evidence (Yes/No). Model 2 presents evidence as a variety score of all types of physical evidence that was collected by authorities. Model 3 presents evidence by analyzing each different type of physical evidence. There were no statistically significant interactions between relationship and evidence types when performing interactions through logistic regressions.

Multinomial Interaction Models

Table 6: Interactions Between Relationship Status and Evidence Types

	(1) Physical Evidence (Y/N)		(2) Evidence Variety Score		(3) Types of Physical Evidence	
	DA Rejected Case **Prior** to Arrest	DA Rejected Case **After** Arrest	DA Rejected Case **Prior** to Arrest	DA Rejected Case **After** Arrest	DA Rejected Case **Prior** to Arrest	DA Rejected Case **After** Arrest
Relationship						
Intimate Partners	1.86	0.97	1.72	-3.13	2.28	1.36
	(1.16)	(0.70)	(1.72)	(2.51)	(1.21)	(0.75)
Other Relationships	1.77	-0.33	-0.44	-0.24	1.96	-0.07
	(1.15)	(0.78)	(1.89)	(1.17)	(1.18)	(0.82)
Relationship x Type of Evidence						
Physical Evidence (Y/N)	-0.01	-0.05				
	(1.18)	(0.83)				
Intimate Partner x Physical Evidence	-1.75	-0.36				
	(1.38)	(0.92)				
Other Relationship x Physical Evidence	-0.84	0.96				
	(1.34)	(0.98)				
Evidence Variety Score			-0.56*	-0.16		
			(0.26)	(0.16)		
Intimate Partner x Evidence Variety Score			-0.69	1.88		
			(1.54)	(1.60)		
Other Relationship x Evidence Variety Score			-14.70	-14.31		
			(969.11)	(1,572.33)		
Blood					-1.55	-17.19
					(4.01)	(4,040.20)
Intimate Partner x Blood					-0.46	15.91
					(4.35)	(4,040.20)
Other Relationship x Blood					0.87	16.83
					(4.53)	(4,040.20)
Hair					-1.93	1.43
					(2.76)	(1.25)
Intimate Partner x Hair					3.66	-1.31
					(3.28)	(1.61)
Other Relationship x Hair					2.90	-1.22
					(2.97)	(1.42)
Skin					3.88	0.05
					(2.16)	(1.68)
Intimate Partner x Skin					-14.81	1.51
					(2,510.35)	(2.34)
Other Relationship x Skin					-20.10	-1.46
					(1,381.46)	(1.89)
Clothes/Bedding					-0.50	-0.70
					(1.37)	(1.04)
Intimate Partner x Clothes/Bedding					-1.16	0.31
					(1.61)	(1.17)
Other Relationship x Clothes/Bedding					-0.06	1.61
					(1.55)	(1.21)
Semen					0.67	0.73
					(1.88)	(1.14)
Intimate Partner x Semen					-4.80	-1.56
					(2.71)	(1.45)
Other Relationship x Semen					-2.36	-1.55
					(2.13)	(1.33)
Vehicle License Plate					1.41	-0.33
					(2.23)	(1.20)
Intimate Partner x Vehicle License Plate					-15.67	-18.31
					(3,621.66)	(4,270.77)
Other Relationship x Vehicle License Plate					13.96	16.55
					(3,469.79)	(3,469.79)
Control Variables						
Risky Behaviors	1.50**	0.40	1.41**	0.36	1.78**	0.64
	(0.53)	(0.37)	(0.52)	(0.35)	(0.63)	(0.41)
Questionable Character Traits	0.66	1.07*	0.54	1.00	0.52	1.15*
	(0.67)	(0.53)	(0.66)	(0.53)	(0.75)	(0.56)
Victim Age	0.03	0.04*	0.03	0.05**	0.02	0.04*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Suspect Age	0.01	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.02	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Victim Race						
Asian American	2.77	0.73	1.78	0.30	2.67	1.07
	(1.50)	(0.96)	(1.49)	(1.00)	(1.65)	(1.06)
Hispanic	0.94	-0.43	0.32	-0.63	1.21	-0.69
	(0.82)	(0.57)	(0.86)	(0.58)	(0.99)	(0.61)
White	1.37	0.78	0.73	0.51	1.55	0.65
	(0.88)	(0.58)	(0.90)	(0.59)	(1.04)	(0.63)
Suspect Race						
Asian American	-1.42	-1.36	-0.34	-1.02	-1.03	-1.77
	(1.58)	(1.03)	(1.60)	(1.07)	(1.69)	(1.07)
Hispanic	-1.63*	0.45	-1.20	0.67	-1.88*	0.48
	(0.79)	(0.53)	(0.79)	(0.53)	(0.93)	(0.56)
White	-1.66	-0.97	-1.38	-0.70	-1.71	-0.97
	(0.90)	(0.63)	(0.89)	(0.61)	(1.04)	(0.67)
Other Race	-0.34	0.12	-0.50	0.21	-1.08	-0.18
	(2.56)	(1.50)	(2.38)	(1.41)	(7.73)	(1.53)
Victim Cooperation	0.57***	-0.25***	0.56***	-0.23**	0.59***	-0.24**
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Prompt Reporting	-2.30***	-0.22	-2.19***	-0.19	-1.92**	0.07
	(0.67)	(0.37)	(0.64)	(0.36)	(0.72)	(0.41)
Rape Case	0.64	0.37	0.77	0.54	0.62	0.37
	(0.76)	(0.47)	(0.75)	(0.46)	(0.81)	(0.50)
Victim Resistance Against Suspect	-0.38*	-0.10	-0.35*	-0.15	-0.49*	-0.16
	(0.18)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.13)	(0.20)	(0.15)
Victim Injury	-0.48	-0.64	-0.56	-0.42	-0.53	-0.65
	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.46)	(0.35)	(0.52)	(0.39)
Victim Received SART Exam	0.85	0.16	0.80	0.34	0.70	0.22
	(0.48)	(0.34)	(0.47)	(0.34)	(0.50)	(0.36)
Weapon Involved	-0.12	0.00	-0.17	0.02	-0.23	0.04
	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.12)	(0.17)	(0.13)
Victim Had Motive to Lie	1.13	1.81**	0.97	1.67**	1.09	1.78**
	(0.74)	(0.61)	(0.72)	(0.58)	(0.80)	(0.63)
Physical Assault	0.76	0.62	0.74	0.70*	1.03	0.69
	(0.48)	(0.37)	(0.48)	(0.35)	(0.53)	(0.40)
Number of Witnesses	-0.13	0.01	-0.10	-0.01	-0.15	0.03
	(0.16)	(0.10)	(0.16)	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.10)
Law Enforcement Agency	0.15	-0.57	0.27	-0.69	0.38	-0.53
	(0.47)	(0.37)	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.53)	(0.41)
Constant	-5.31**	-1.32	-3.51**	-1.04	-5.31**	-1.34
	(1.71)	(1.02)	(1.27)	(0.87)	(1.85)	(1.11)
Observations	367	367	363	363	363	363
Standard errors in parentheses						
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05						

Table 6 shows the multinomial interactions between relationship and evidence types. Similarly to the previous set of multinomial regression models, Model 1 presents evidence as a dichotomous measure of physical evidence (Yes/No). Model 2 presents evidence as a variety score of all types of physical evidence. Model 3 presents each individual type of physical evidence. There were no statistically significant interactions between relationship and evidence types when performing interactions through multinomial regressions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to determine how cases of sexual assault among strangers and non-strangers are prosecuted, and if the presence of physical evidence plays a role in this decision making process. Overall, the analysis reveals that among cases of sexual assault that were reported to the LAPD and LASD in 2008, there was no statistically significant difference in how cases were charged among strangers, intimate partners, or other relationships. The presence of physical evidence, however, did reveal some promise in that the collection of semen can lead to a lower probability of pre-arrest rejection of a case by a prosecutor. In the analysis of victim-suspect relationship affecting charging decisions, these findings were consistent with Spohn & Tellis (2019) in that the relationship between victims and offenders did not significantly impact how a case was charged.

The present study builds on the work of Spohn and Tellis (2019). In Spohn & Tellis (2019), the authors used the same quantitative dataset of sexual assault cases reported to the LAPD and LASD in 2008. It was found that a significant number of cases are rejected by the district attorney prior to the arrest of a suspect, and that cases where the police seemingly have probable cause to arrest a suspect do not actually result in the arrest of a suspect. Their study was specifically focused on the decision-making processes of police officers and prosecutors, but the current study examines charging decisions more broadly, focusing on decisions made by the district attorney. These decisions include the decision to charge, the decision to reject a case prior to the arrest of a suspect, and the decision to reject a case after the arrest of a suspect.

The current study differs from Spohn & Tellis (2019) due to its focus on the effects of the victim-suspect relationship and the presence or absence of physical evidence on the decision to charge in sexual assault cases. Relationship and evidence variables, while using the same data, were manipulated in this study to specifically account for three different categories of relationships—while Spohn & Tellis (2019) recorded 19 different types of relationships in their study. Evidence in this study was measured in three different ways, but Spohn & Tellis (2019) measured evidence in one way, using the dichotomous measure of 0 = no physical evidence and 1 = some physical evidence. Spohn & Tellis (2019) found that physical evidence was statistically significant in predicting the prosecutor's decision to file charges, but that was not the case in this study overall. Victim characteristics such as risk-taking behaviors and character traits were utilized in both studies.

After analysis and research on prior studies regarding relationships and physical evidence, limitations can be identified in this study. First, this study utilized only three categories of relationships to assess whether relationship status between victims and offenders has an effect on charging decisions. Due to Spohn & Tellis (2019)'s data including 19 different relationship categories, relationship in this study was consolidated into only three categories in an attempt to focus on strangers versus intimate partners more generally, but this left the "other" category filled with relationships that could have perhaps shown statistical significance if focus was given to them on their own. For example, relationships such as "parent" and "neighbor" were both placed into the "other" category, but a case in which the victim was assaulted by a parent or guardian may be viewed as more serious or severe by the prosecutor than one involving a neighbor.

Another limitation of this study is that DNA was not included as a form of physical evidence in any of the models. This decision was made because out of 382 cases used in this study, DNA was only collected for 46 cases, while other types of physical evidence such as clothes/bedding were present in 195 cases. Perhaps with more relationship categories and the inclusion of DNA, results could have shown a statistical difference in how cases were prosecuted among relationship types. Prior research has shown that DNA evidence is most beneficial in cases where the perpetrator is a stranger, but there were only 59 cases involving strangers out of 382 cases in the dataset.

Further analysis of this data may be necessary in the future to specifically focus on variables regarding victim credibility, such as risk taking behaviors and character concerns. These variables were used as controls in this study, but it may be intriguing to examine victim risk taking behaviors or character concerns as an independent variable in relation to charging decision as the dependent variable. The current study did find that risk and character were statistically significant predictors in whether or not charges were filed for a case, as well as whether the district attorney rejected a case prior to or after an arrest, relative to being charged. Prior research has shown that in cases of stranger sexual assault where physical evidence may not have been present, police and prosecutors have to rely on statements from the victim and the perpetrator (Beichner & Spohn, 2005; Franklin et al., 2023). Due to the presence of rape myths, victim credibility is often questioned if law enforcement has reason to believe that the victim was drinking or engaging in drugs, wearing a revealing outfit, or surrounding herself with people who may be considered untrustworthy, along with other character concerns that may be personal to individual law enforcement officers.

Future research should continue to analyze how relationships between victims and offenders influence charging decisions. Charging decisions can vary by location, so future studies could potentially examine multiple sets of data at once from different cities to determine if location is a factor in how sexual assault cases are charged regarding stranger and non-strangers. Throughout the United States, there is great divide in terms of political beliefs according to geographic location. It could be hypothesized that states in which authorities tend to be more conservative could harbor more intense rape myth beliefs than states that tend to have more liberal authorities. This could potentially mean that cases of sexual assault in more conservative states may be less likely to be charged than in states that are more liberal. Studies examining geographic location in regard to sexual assault case charging decisions could shed light on how sexual assault is viewed across the country, and perhaps lead to new laws or policies.

While there has been some progression in how sexual assault is punished and viewed in society today since the 1960s and 1970s, there is still a great deal of stigma and negative attitudes toward individuals who have been victims of sexual assault. Victims who experience intimate partner rape or other forms of sexual assault may choose not to report due to shame and fear that law enforcement will not believe them or taking any measures to punish the offender. The prevalence of rape myths and stigma against victims highlights a dire need for more comprehensive sexual education programs in the United States. Many people still believe that they cannot be assaulted by the person they are married to or dating, and this is not an issue that is emphasized much in society today. Additionally, educational programs should focus on the act of giving consent and what it means to consent to sexual acts. Intimate partner sexual assault is the most common form

of sexual assault, but efforts could be made to change this by providing more thorough education on the importance of asking for and receiving consent, regardless of relationship status.

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