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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 2006; 12; 321

DOI: 10.1177/1077801206286311

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Gender Equality and Women's Absolute Status

A Test of the Feminist Models of Rape

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Feminist theory predicts both a positive and negative relationship between gender equality and rape rates. Although liberal and radical feminist theory predicts that gender equality should ameliorate rape victimization, radical feminist theorists have argued that gender equality may increase rape in the form of male backlash. Alternatively, Marxist criminologists focus on women's absolute socioeconomic status rather than gender equality as a predictor of rape rates, whereas socialist feminists combine both radical and Marxist perspectives. This study uses factor analysis to overcome multicollinearity limitations of past studies while exploring the relationship between women's absolute and relative socioeconomic status on rape rates in major U.S. cities using 2000 census data. The findings indicate support for both the Marxist and radical feminist explanations of rape but no support for the ameliorative hypothesis. These findings support a more inclusive socialist feminist theory that takes both Marxist and radical feminist hypotheses into account.

Keywords: *feminist theory; rape; rape rates*

Tests of feminist models of rape, highlighting such issues as patriarchy and women's historical systemic subordination to men (Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977; Griffin, 1979; Russell, 1975), have come a long way since their introduction to criminological studies in the 1970s. During the past three decades, this research has tested three feminist hypotheses of the relationship between gender-specific structural equality, women's absolute socioeconomic status, and rape rates. One hypothesis found in both radical and liberal feminist work predicts a negative relationship between gender equality and rape. That is, in areas with higher levels of gender equal-

Authors' Note: All three authors contributed equally to this article and the order of the names does not represent the value of their contribution.

ity rape rates are expected to be lower compared to areas that exhibit less gender equality. Whaley and Messner (2002) have referred to this as the *ameliorative* hypothesis, whereby gender equality is expected to ease levels of rape victimization. An alternative hypothesis found in some radical feminist literature predicts a positive relationship between gender equality and rape rates. This *backlash* hypothesis predicts that as gender equality increases, so will rape rates (at least in the short term; Russell, 1975; Williams & Holmes, 1981). In essence, the backlash hypothesis suggests that if women remain in their subordinate position, men are less threatened and less likely to rape women (Russell, 1975). The Marxist feminist hypothesis conceptualizes the problem in very different terms and predicts that increases in women's absolute status will reduce rape rates (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1983).

Although past studies have attempted to test one or all of these hypotheses using various measures of both women's absolute and relative status, such as differences in labor force participation (Austin & Kim, 2000; Avakame, 1999; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Whaley, 2001), political and public office participation (Austin & Kim, 2000; Baron & Straus, 1987; Linsky, Bachman, & Straus, 1995; Peterson & Bailey, 1992), educational attainment (Bailey, 1999; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001), participation in legal spheres (Baron & Straus, 1987; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Linsky et al., 1995; Whaley, 2001), and women's economic status (Bailey, 1999; Baron & Straus, 1987; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Linsky et al., 1995; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001) the results have been quite confounding. Whaley (2001) argues that the primary limitation of these studies is that both a positive and negative relationship between gender equality and rape is predicted. Additionally, multicollinearity problems make it difficult to test the relationships between both relative (i.e., gender equality) and women's absolute status and rape within the same models. In this study, we use exploratory factor analysis to create both a gender equality component and an absolute status component so that multiple hypotheses can be tested simultaneously. This study also advances past studies by using the most recent decennial data available. Comparing these more recent data on women's status and rape to the extant research from 1970 to 1990 may help establish a pattern in our understanding of women's status and rape.

Literature Review

Macrolevel Studies of Rape

Structural explanations of crime are often found within both general and feminist theories of crime. In the past, macrolevel tests have examined several different explanations of rape, including the ameliorative, backlash, and Marxist hypotheses (Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Maume, 1989; Peterson & Bailey, 1988, 1992; Smith & Bennett, 1985); general economic deprivation and equality (Bailey, 1999; Baron & Straus, 1987; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Linsky et al., 1995; Smith & Bennett, 1985; Whaley, 2001); tenets of social disorganization theory

(Bailey, 1999; Baron & Straus, 1987; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Linsky et al., 1995; Maume, 1989; Whaley, 2001); pornography consumption (Baron & Straus, 1987; Linsky et al., 1995); and the cultural spillover of violence (Baron & Straus, 1987; Linsky et al., 1995). Common sociodemographic control variables include race, age, marital status, the ratio of males to females (Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; O'Brien, 1991; Whaley, 2001), church membership (Baron & Straus, 1987; Linsky et al., 1995; Peterson & Bailey, 1988), and Southern region (Maume, 1989; Smith & Bennett, 1985). Related to socioeconomic conditions, the results suggest that the percentage of divorced females, poverty, family income inequality (as measured by the Gini index), urban residence, and residential mobility are among the more consistent indicators of higher rape rates.

Women's Socioeconomic Status, Gender Equality, and Rape

Several macrolevel analyses have tested the relationship between gender-specific socioeconomic equality and rape victimization (Austin & Kim, 2000; Bailey, 1999; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001) and/or women's absolute status and rape (Austin & Kim, 2000; Bailey, 1999; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001). These tests of feminist hypotheses of rape derive primarily from four strains of thought: liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist feminisms.¹

Marxist feminist hypothesis: Areas where women's absolute status is high will have lower rape rates compared to areas where women's absolute status is low.

Radical and liberal feminist hypothesis (ameliorative hypothesis): In areas where gender equality is high, rape rates will be lower than in areas with less gender equality.

Alternative radical feminist hypothesis (backlash hypothesis): Areas where gender equality is high will have higher rape rates than areas where gender equality is low.

Socialist feminist hypothesis: Both women's absolute status and gender equality will significantly influence rape rates.

Marxist Feminist Hypothesis

Marxist theory explains that the capitalist system is based on a hierarchal structure that relies on the oppression of certain groups, primarily women, to avoid collapse (Jaggar, 1988). From a feminist perspective, it may not be capitalism in and of itself to blame for women's victimization but rather how the capitalist economy presents unique status dilemmas for women (because of their patriarchal devaluation) that lead to violent victimization. Women are said to be more vulnerable to violent victimization as a result of the social instability inherent in capitalist societies (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1983). For instance, despite the increases in median yearly pay to women during the last two decades, women (particularly young, less-educated women) still hold the majority of low-wage jobs (59%) in the United States (Kim, 2000). These low wages are likely responsible for the "feminization of poverty,"²

whereby working women are still more likely than working men to live at or below poverty (Beers, 2000).

Traditionally, empirical tests of Marxist theories of rape examine variables such as overall levels of poverty, unemployment, labor force participation, and low wages (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1983). Macrolevel rape studies of this type have identified women's status within the capitalist system as problematic. The Marxist focus on this economic structure predicts that an improvement in women's absolute status will result in lower rape rates (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1983). Studies testing the link between women's status and rape rates have traditionally relied on four measures of women's status: female median income (Bailey, 1999; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004), female educational attainment (Bailey, 1999; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004), labor force participation (Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Whaley, 2001), and occupational prestige (Austin & Kim, 2000; Bailey, 1999; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001). These studies do not present a consistent body of findings as to the link between women's economic conditions and rape. Consistent with Marxist feminist hypotheses, Bailey (1999) finds that in cities where women receive higher median wages, rape rates are significantly lower. Although there is often a link between wages and educational attainment (Kim, 2000), Bailey finds no significant link between the percentage of women with a bachelor's degree and rape rates. However, the results found in Eschholz and Vieraitis's (2004) study indicate that higher educational attainment exacerbates rape rates. Findings regarding occupational prestige,³ with the exception of one study (Bailey, 1999), contradict Marxist feminist predictions: Higher occupational prestige is related to higher rape rates (Austin & Kim, 2000; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001). Similarly, female labor force participation does not appear to be significantly related to the rape rate in the years 1970 and 1980 but is associated with a significantly higher rape rate in 1990 (Whaley, 2001). These conflicting findings draw attention to the need to further examine why some indicators of women's economic status (income) are associated with lower rape rates whereas other indicators (occupational prestige and labor force participation) suggest the opposite effect.

Ameliorative and Backlash Hypotheses

Liberal feminists focus on social justice, consisting largely of legalized access and equal opportunity for success rather than specific protections from violence against women (MacKinnon, 1989; Messerschmidt, 1986). Once women have equal access to succeed alongside men in the public sphere, liberal feminists argue that women will experience less discrimination and deprivation. Theoretically, these gains are expected to translate into a more equal treatment of women, including reducing their risk of victimization.

Similarly, radical feminism posits that rape is a method of patriarchal maintenance, which helps to reify the larger patriarchal system (Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004). The radical feminist movement focuses on rape and violence against women (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1979; MacKinnon, 1989; Russell, 1975) by emphasizing

patriarchy as the primary stratification system that keeps women from equal access to resources and dependent on men for protection both physically and financially. Gender norms emphasize women as property, and objects of sexual objectification create a culture more accepting of sexual intimidation, aggression, and violence. Radical and liberal feminists contend that when women achieve economic, educational, political, and/or legal parity with men, the stratification system is weakened, and in turn, so are the social supports for rape (the ameliorative effect).

Both radical and, to a lesser extent, liberal feminist theories focus on the structural position of women in recognizing the gendered nature of rape and may help to explain stranger rape, acquaintance rape, and date rape.⁴ These arguments form the basis of the ameliorative hypothesis, which predicts that equality will lower rape rates.

Consequent to women's gains in male-dominated structural footholds, some have predicted that men may feel or perceive a threat to their power and that this threat may manifest itself in the form of male backlash (Russell, 1975). Unfortunately, a short-term consequence of gaining equality may be a backlash against women's gains through the use of rape (Russell, 1975; Whaley, 2001). Over time, radical feminism predicts that as a result of gender equality, rape-supportive attitudes should become less integrated in the social structure, thus reducing their influence in shaping gender relations.

Tests of the ameliorative and the backlash hypotheses have explored the relative status of women to men in income, education, labor force participation, and occupation status. In terms of income equality and rape, three studies report no significant relationship between sex-based income stratification and rape (Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Linsky et al., 1995), whereas two studies provide support for the ameliorative hypothesis (Bailey, 1999; Whaley, 2001).⁵ These two studies find that across time, increases in income equality are significantly associated with a decline in the rape rate. In particular, Bailey's (1999) findings during the period of 1980 to 1990 suggest that if the gender disparity in median annual pay were reduced to zero, city rape rates would be reduced by nearly 10 per 100,000 females. In contrast, three studies report a backlash effect (Austin & Kim, 2000; Baron & Straus, 1987; Peterson & Bailey, 1992). Generally, these studies suggest that in cities, metropolitan statistical areas, and states where women's income is approaching or surpassing that of their male counterparts, rape rates are significantly higher. Overall, there is a consistent trend in the research indicating the importance of examining the female-male income gap. What is less clear is the direction of the relationship between the male-female income gap and rape rates.

Another indicator of women's relative socioeconomic position is their educational attainment. To date, there is no consistent significant association between relative high school (Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Peterson & Bailey, 1992) or college educational attainment (see Austin & Kim, 2000; Bailey, 1999; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Whaley, 2001) and levels of rape. In the only study to find a significant effect for relative educational attainment, Whaley (2001) reports that in 1980, women's relative gains in college educational attainment were significantly related to higher rape rates in U.S. cities, whereas across time (1970 to 1990), shifts in the educa-

tion gap appear to have an ameliorative effect on city rape rates. Eschholz and Vieraitis (2004) report that White women's and Black women's relative college educational attainment were related to higher White and Black rape rates, respectively, in U.S. cities.

In addition, four studies have examined women's relative labor force participation (Austin & Kim, 2000; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Whaley, 2001) and rape.⁶ Two studies indicate no significant link between relative labor force participation and rape (Austin & Kim, 2000; Ellis & Beattie, 1983), whereas two studies (Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Whaley, 2001) suggest that areas with greater inequality in labor force participation are subject to lower rape rates. These findings do not support the ameliorative hypothesis that gender equality should significantly lower rape rates, lending support to the backlash hypothesis. Overall, it is still unclear if women's labor force participation (independent of the type of work they do) is a reliable predictor of rape rates across cities (Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Whaley, 2001) or nations (Austin & Kim, 2000). Moreover, it may be the case that labor force participation per se is not related to reductions or increases in the rape rate, because there is also disparity within the female population relating to occupational prestige. For instance, the case may be that relative fluctuations in female employment in low-level service sector jobs are not related to rape rates but that shifts in women's gains within traditionally male-dominated fields, such as medicine, corporate management, and science, may influence changes in rape rates.

To further examine this issue, four tests of the ameliorative hypothesis have included these measures of women's representation in traditionally male-dominated fields of work. In particular, Ellis and Beattie (1983) examined the effects of changes in the share of legal and police positions that are occupied by females. Whereas the percentage of female police officers in a city during the 1970s was a significant predictor of higher rape rates, the percentage of females that were judges and lawyers was not. Similarly, studies have included measures of the percentage of females holding public office (Austin & Kim, 2000; Baron & Straus, 1987; Linsky et al., 1995; Peterson & Bailey, 1992). The majority of these find no significant association between female public office holders and rape, although Baron and Straus's (1987) findings suggest that relative to other states in the United States, those with more female public office holders appear to have a significantly lower rape rate.

Expanding on this concept, several studies (Bailey, 1999; Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Peterson & Bailey, 1992) have examined the effect of relative occupational prestige and rape rates. Specifically, these authors explored how the gender gap in the percentage of those employed in managerial or executive occupations influenced rape rates. Of these, one study (Bailey, 1999) found significant evidence of a backlash effect in both 1980 and 1990 in areas characterized by a narrower gap in occupational prestige, and Eschholz and Vieraitis (2004) found evidence of a backlash effect in 1990 in their sample of all women. The remaining studies report no significant relationship between relative occupational prestige and rape rates.

Several studies have also examined the link between legal advances in gender equity and rape rates that suggest positive effects associated with liberal feminist legal

reform. For example, in cities (Whaley, 2001) and states (Baron & Straus, 1987) that have passed gender-equity legislation, rape rates are significantly lower.

Several themes emerge from these studies of women's status, gender equality, and rape. First, Bailey (1999), Eschholz and Vieraitis (2004), and Whaley (2001) suggest that both the absolute status of women and the relative status of women play important roles in explaining rape rates. This proposition is consistent with socialist feminist explanations of rape and violence against women. Socialist feminism combines the ideas of radical and Marxist feminism by focusing on capitalist patriarchy. Capitalism and patriarchy consist of a "dialectical relationship" whereby sexual hierarchies exist within and are exacerbated by the capitalist sociopolitical structure (Eisenstein, 1979, p. 5). Whereas Marxist feminism identifies power as stemming from class position, and radical feminism identifies power as rooted in one's sex, socialist feminism emphasizes the unique role of women as a class within the economic structure. They assert that although class may define the struggles of the poor, women are at a further disadvantage within the sexual hierarchy. This argument thus incorporates both women's absolute and relative status as important correlates of their violent victimization.

In effect both women's absolute status and relative status may be important predictors of rape (Bailey, 1999; Whaley, 2001). However, few studies simultaneously incorporate both relative and absolute status measures into their statistical models. Doing so may provide more theoretical and practical insight into which indicators of women's status (absolute vs. relative to men) are more predictive of rape rates. Unfortunately, simultaneously incorporating absolute and relative equality measures into statistical models would likely induce multicollinearity among the covariates, an issue not adequately addressed in previous studies.

Second, there does not appear to be any clear indication of which measures of women's status are more consistently related to the rape rate. It appears that women may benefit from some relative gains (being employed and being in high prestige occupations), whereas other relative gains (income) appear to be related to higher rape rates.

Third, there is no consistent pattern of results that predict the direction of the relationship between women's gains and rape rates. For example, four studies (Bailey, 1999; Baron & Straus, 1987; Eschholz & Vieraitis, 2004; Whaley, 2001) report support for both the backlash and ameliorative hypotheses within the same model, seemingly making the radical feminist hypothesis unfalsifiable (Whaley, 2001). That is, if the ameliorative effect is not evident, this still fails to falsify the radical feminist hypotheses of rape. In short, it remains unclear whether there is a relationship between gender equality and rape rates, regardless of the measures that are used to test these hypotheses. Although previous literature points to the importance of feminist theory in explaining fluctuations in the rape rate, it remains unclear what components of women's status significantly predict the direction and significance of this relationship.

The current study looks at four structural theoretical arguments put forth by various strains of feminism. Using 2000 census data from 238 large U.S. cities, we examine the relationship between women's absolute status and rape to test the socialist feminist

and Marxist feminist hypotheses. We employ measures of women's status relative to men to test the liberal, radical, and socialist feminist concerns of gender equality. Finally, all tests are included in one model so that the relative weight of the empirical support for each hypothesis can be assessed.

Data and Methods

This study uses a sample of 238 U.S. cities with a population of 100,000 or more in the year 2000. Cities were selected for numerous reasons. First, the use of cities allows for a larger sample size than using states or metropolitan statistical areas, as past studies have done. Second, National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) figures indicate that rape rates are highest among young, never married, low income, urban residents (Greenfeld, 1997; Rennison, 2001), making central cities an appropriate unit of analysis.

Dependent Variable

The rape victimization rate was constructed from data on the number of rapes reported in the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) from 1998 to 2000 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998-2001). This variable was computed by taking the number of rapes known to police, dividing by the total female population, and then multiplying this number by 100,000 to compute a rape rate for each city in 1998, 1999, and 2000.⁷ Next, an overall 3-year mean rape rate was computed for each city by adding the rape rate figures for each year and dividing by 3. Following convention for cross-sectional studies, the number of female rapes was averaged across the 3 years to reduce the influence of random year-to-year fluctuations. Any city with more than 100,000 residents not reporting a rape rate for 1998 to 2000 or not in compliance with UCR guidelines for reporting rape (e.g., Illinois cities) was dropped from the analysis.⁸ After these cities were eliminated, the final number of cases used in the analysis was 228.

Using official rape statistics presents several methodological issues. First, it is widely recognized in the area of crime research that official rape statistics do not provide a complete picture of the prevalence of rape victimization. Regardless, several studies indicate that the seriousness of the crime, indicated by factors such as the use of force, the extent of injury to the victim, and the offender being a stranger, is a key determinant of whether the crime is reported to the police (Gove, Hughes, & Geerken, 1985; Lizotte, 1985). Therefore, past research suggests that although UCR data may not provide a measure of a city's "true" rape rate, they are probably a relatively accurate indicator of rapes involving strangers, with additional violence and bodily harm beyond the rape itself, and where the legal evidence is clear (Gove et al., 1985; Lizotte, 1985; Maume, 1989). This research suggests that official rape statistics may underrepresent the prevalence of nonstranger rape, less violent rapes, and those not involving a weapon. Recent research, however, indicates that police notification of stranger and nonstranger rape has significantly increased since the 1970s and that by the 1990s, there was no significant difference between reporting practices for victims

of stranger versus nonstranger rapes (Baumer, Felson, & Messner, 2003).⁹ Nonetheless, the concern about differences in police notification of stranger and nonstranger rapes is most problematic in studies attempting to determine the level of rape, and the aim of this study is not to determine the extent and frequency of rape but rather to examine how rape rates vary with social structural factors.

Whaley (2001) points out that using official statistics is warranted in this type of study because cities reporting higher official rape rates typically have higher rape rates (and higher violent crime overall). Whaley (2001) further notes that the most pressing concern is that some of the underestimation for rapes may be related to aspects of gender equality. For instance, in cities where women have achieved parity with men, women may be more likely to report rape to the police. These women may have more mobility, financial resources, and confidence in "fighting back." Alternatively, cities with lower levels of gender equality may be associated with women's being afraid to report, especially in a structure where they must frequently rely on male protection and resources. Unfortunately, the UCR data are the only data available for testing feminist structural explanations of rape on a large sample of cities.

Measures of Women's Absolute and Relative Status

Data used to measure the absolute status of women along economic, educational, employment, and occupational dimensions were drawn from the *2000 Census of the Population: Social and Economic Characteristics* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Our measures include (a) female median income (in 1999 dollars), (b) the percentage of women 25 years and older who have completed a bachelor's degree, (c) the percentage of women 16 years and older employed in the civilian labor force, and (d) the percentage of women 16 years and older employed in management, professional, and related occupations. Women's relative status in economic, educational, employment, and occupational spheres was measured as the absolute female measures divided by the absolute measures for males. For example, gender equality in income was calculated by dividing female median income by male median income, yielding a ratio. In all cases, the value of the gender equality variables increases as the male "advantage" decreases.

Initial bivariate analysis revealed several correlations that neared or exceeded .70. These correlations were associated with the measures of women's absolute status. In initial model estimations, collinearity diagnostics that include tolerance measures, such as the variance inflation ratio (VIF), indicated that these measures were highly correlated with the measures of gender equality and measures of resource deprivation, such as poverty and percentage unemployed. To retain theoretically important variables and to avoid model misspecification, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on these variables. This technique involves data reduction of these measures into a more parsimonious construct that measures the overall dimensions of the women's absolute status variables. Employing principal components analysis with varimax rotation, the measures of females' median income, percentage of females with a bachelor's degree, percentage of females employed, and percentage of females employed

in management occupations all retained (i.e., loaded onto) one component. Results showed that the factor loadings all exceeded .800, with percentage of females employed in management occupations yielding the highest loading, at .925. Because all of these measures loaded onto one component, varimax rotation was not necessary, and the component accounts for 76.31% of the total variance. Because these variables appeared to all be measuring one underlying structure, we retained the component and refer to it as women's absolute status (ABSOFAC).

These measures of women's absolute status were also highly correlated with the measures of gender equality. This is because one half of each ratio measure is composed of its corresponding absolute measure. In addition, the ratio of women's to men's earnings was significantly correlated (.57) with the sex ratio of employment in management occupations. For theoretical purposes, we test the effects of absolute status (Marxist feminist theory) and gender equality (radical feminist theory) measures separately by conducting principal components analysis using varimax rotation. Again, these measures extracted one component, explaining 58% of the total variance. We refer to this new variable as a gender equality index (RATIOFAC). Therefore, we include an index of women's absolute status and an index of gender equality in the regression model, allowing us to conduct a more comprehensive theoretical test of feminist models.

Control Variables

The control variables were selected on the basis of their theoretical and empirical links to previous research on violent crime in urban areas (Baron & Straus, 1987; J. R. Blau & Blau, 1982; P. M. Blau & Golden, 1986; Linsky et al., 1995; Peterson & Bailey, 1988, 1992; Whaley, 2001). These measures, taken from *Census 2000*, include city population, population density, percent population change from 1990 to 2000, percentage Black, percentage Hispanic, percentage of the population between the ages of 18 and 34, percentage of females divorced, percentage of the population living below the poverty line, percentage unemployed, and the Gini index of income inequality. Several of the variables exhibited highly skewed distributions in preliminary analyses. These variables include percentage Black, percentage Hispanic, city population, and population density. Skewed distributions may lead to biased, unreliable beta weight coefficients (King, 1986). To correct for these positively skewed distributions, the natural log function was taken and the transformed variables were entered in the analysis.

A final check of multicollinearity in the independent variables revealed that some of our control measures associated with socioeconomic conditions in cities (i.e., percentage living under the poverty line, percentage unemployed, and the Gini index) were highly correlated. Similar to the model put forth by Land, McCall, and Cohen (1990), we conducted principal components analyses to explore whether if combined, these three measures comprised one theoretical construct representing socioeconomic status in cities.¹⁰ All three measures loaded onto one component, with factor loadings all above .700. We retained this single component, which explained 76.85% of the total variance. In line with Land et al., we refer to this index as resource deprivation or

Table 1
Variables Used in the Regression Equations (N = 228)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Predicted Relationship	
			Backlash	Ameliorative
1998 to 2000 mean rape rate (ln)	4.34	.66		
Women's absolute status				
Median female earnings	19436.34	4091.24		–
% Female BA	15.89	6.19		–
% Female employment	54.39	5.83		–
% Female management	3.86	1.35		–
Absolute status component	–.00	1.00		–
Women's relative status				
Female:male earnings	.70	.08	+	–
Female:male BA	.93	.09	+	–
Female:male employment	.84	.07	+	–
Female:male management	.64	.13	+	–
Relative status component	.00	1.00	+	–
Control variables				
Percent population density (ln)	8.11	.71		+
Population change 1990 to 2000	15.52	27.73		+
% Below poverty level	14.64	6.11		+
% Black (ln)	2.23	1.32		+
% Hispanic (ln)	2.42	1.14		+
% Ages 18 to 34	31.44	4.76		+
Gini index	.42	.05		+
% Unemployed	3.37	1.13		+
% Females divorced	12.11	2.34		+
Resource deprivation Component	.00	1.00		+

Note: – indicates a negative relationship between the independent variable and rape rate. + indicates a positive relationship between the independent variable and rape rate. + and – together indicate that both a positive (backlash) and a negative (ameliorative) relationship between women's relative status and rape rates are consistent with radical feminist theory.

affluence. Table 1 lists the variables used in the regression analysis, a description of how each variable is measured, the mean, the standard deviation, and the direction of the relationship predicted between each independent variable and the dependent variable.

Method of Analysis

Scatter plots were run to diagnose heteroscedasticity, revealing the city population variable to be problematic. To correct for this problem, this analysis uses weighted least squares (WLS) regression, weighting by the natural log of the city population (Berry & Feldman, 1985). For this analysis, the average rape rate from 1998 to 2000 was regressed on the factor scores of women's absolute status, women's status relative

Table 2
Weighted Least Squares Regression of the 1998 to 2000
Mean Rape Rate on Gender Status and Equality Measures

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Measure of women's absolute status					
Factor score of women's absolute status measures	-.134	.048	-.198	-2.779	.006
Measures of gender equality					
Factor score of women's relative status measures	.117	.046	.176	2.529	.012
Measures of resource deprivation					
Factor score of Gini, poverty, and unemployment	.132	.058	.197	2.264	.025
Control variables					
% Young (18 to 34)	.022	.009	.155	2.356	.019
% Females divorced	.084	.018	.296	4.694	.000
Percent population change 1990 to 2000	.000	.002	.015	.230	.818
Population density (ln)	-.158	.060	-.169	-2.618	.009
% Black (ln)	.038	.038	.076	.994	.322
% Hispanic (ln)	-.055	.038	-.095	-1.438	.152
Adjusted R^2	.355				
<i>df</i>	226				
<i>N</i>	228				

Note: Weighted least squares regression = weighted by the natural log function of the city population. Coefficients in bold are significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

to men and resource deprivation or affluence, the log function of population density, population change between 1990 and 2000, the log of percentage Black, the log of percentage Hispanic, percentage young (18-34), and percentage of females divorced.

An examination of skewness and kurtosis revealed a leptokurtic distribution of the error terms in the dependent variable. This violates the assumption of a linear relationship, with a normal distribution of the error terms. To correct for this, the natural log of the rape rate was used for this analysis. The appendix provides the bivariate correlations among all of the predictors and the logged mean rape rate.

Results

The results of WLS regression are reported in Table 2. There are five significant predictors of rape rates: women's absolute status ($b = -.134$), gender equality ($b = .117$), resource deprivation or affluence ($b = .132$), percentage of young population ($b = .022$), percentage of females divorced ($b = .084$), and population density ($b = -.158$). Although several studies found percentage Black (Peterson & Bailey, 1988, 1992; Smith & Bennett, 1985) to be a significant predictor of rape, in the present study, it was not significant when controlling for resource deprivation or affluence, the status of women, and population factors. Similarly, percentage Hispanic also failed to reach significance.

One of the strongest predictors of rape rates in the model was women's absolute status. In cities where women have higher incomes, higher percentages of college degrees obtained, higher labor force participation, and higher occupational status, rape rates are significantly lower. It is likely that this finding is due mostly to female median income ($r = -.38, p < .01$) and the percentage of females in management occupations ($r = -.349, p = .01$), which are the two absolute measures that were most strongly correlated with the rape rate in bivariate analyses. This finding supports both the Marxist and socialist feminist hypotheses that predict that higher absolute status for women should result in lower rape rates. Taken together, the findings relating to women's absolute status bolster the argument that perhaps women's status by itself (i.e., their varying levels of exploitation and success in a capitalist economy) must also be examined, not just women's status in relation to men.

The ameliorative hypothesis is not supported when analyzing the effect of gender equality. Instead, in cities where gender equality is higher, rape rates are also higher, indicating a backlash effect. Both the women's absolute status index and gender equality index retain significance when controlling for variables that previous studies argue may be more significant predictors of rape, such as social disorganization (Linsky et al., 1995), percentage Black (Peterson & Bailey, 1988; Smith & Bennett, 1985), and general economic inequality (Peterson & Bailey, 1988). At first glance, these two significant findings supporting the Marxist and the radical backlash hypothesis seem theoretically conflicting. However, these two explanations actually complement each other when taking into account a more integrated socialist feminist model of rape. Taken together, these findings support the socialist feminist position that society is structured according to the dual systems of class and gender, which puts women in a position of cumulative structural disadvantage.

Three of the control variables also significantly account for variation in rape rates. The strongest predictor of rape rates in the model is percentage of females divorced. In cities with a higher percentage of divorced females, rape rates are significantly higher. This is in accordance with a majority of the extant literature (Baron & Straus, 1987; Maume, 1989; Peterson & Bailey, 1988; 1992; Smith & Bennett, 1985; Whaley, 2001) as well as NCVS (Rennison, 2001) figures indicating that divorced and separated women composed the second-largest share of rape victims (after never-married women) in the year 2000. This has been interpreted in past research as evidence of a male backlash and/or social disorganization. Related to the backlash concept, it has been documented that education plays a major role in structuring women's lives (Ollenburger & Moore, 1992). F. D. Blau's (1997; F. D. Blau & Ferber, 1986) research has shown that college-educated women delay marriage and childbearing and that divorce is less financially damaging to these women because of their higher social capital. This may decrease women's economic reliance on men. Consequently, this shift in power and reliance on male resources may serve as a threat to patriarchal structure and privilege. This backlash effect may also reflect social disorganization indicators, such as the upheaval of broken homes, female-headed households, and women's changing socioeconomic status, that often result from divorce.

With an effect slightly stronger than the effect of the women's absolute status index ($\beta = -.198$), the resource deprivation or affluence component is the third-strongest predictor of rape rates in the model ($\beta = .197$). In cities with higher levels of deprivation, rape rates are significantly higher. This is consistent with both social disorganization and Marxist theoretical research showing a significant relationship between poverty, inequality, and rape rates (Bailey, 1999; Linsky et al., 1995; Peterson & Bailey, 1988, 1992; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1983; Smith & Bennett, 1985; Whaley, 2001). Additionally, cities with a higher percentage of young population (ages 18 to 34) report significantly higher rape rates. This positive, significant finding replicates similar results from previous rape studies (Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001), although it is notable that for the most part, percentage young has consistently been reported as nonsignificant in the rape literature.

One unexpected finding is the significant, negative relationship between population density and rape rates. The data indicate that cities characterized by a higher population density are associated with lower rape rates. This negative density effect is not simply a function of mass city depopulation, because population change from 1990 to 2000 is controlled for in the model. This finding contradicts what is generally accepted as a positive association in crime research. With few exceptions (Kvalseth, 1977; Spector, 1975), macrolevel studies of crime typically show a positive relationship between density and crime rates (Kposowa, Breault, & Harrison, 1995; Osborn, Trickett, & Elder, 1992; Patterson, 1991).

Summary and Conclusion

The findings here illustrate support for the Marxist and radical feminist models of rape, but overall, there is no support for the ameliorative hypothesis that gender equality is associated with lower rape rates. Together, these results indicate support for the socialist feminist model: that society is simultaneously structured along both class and gender lines. In this study, greater gender equality was related to higher rape rates, but higher absolute status of women (which often accompanies higher gender equality) was associated with lower rape rates. The presence of these two relationships in the same model may help to explain why results from past research have been inconsistent.

These findings have several implications for criminological theory, future empirical research, and social policy. The theoretical implications here are threefold. First, there is no support for an ameliorative effect of gender equality on rape rates in the year 2000. In fact, results indicate a backlash effect for the gender equality measures. This could be because of the fact that women have achieved gains in this area (especially in obtaining a college education), which men may perceive as threatening their hold on socioeconomic status (F. D. Blau, 1997; Kelson, 1998; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002).

Second, the findings here contradict much of the research that identifies economic, ethnic, racial, or gender inequality rather than absolute deprivation as the most signifi-

cant predictor of rape (Maume, 1989; Peterson & Bailey, 1988, 1992). The present analysis reveals that in addition to gender equality's being a significant influence on rape, women's absolute status does indeed matter when holding these other social indicators constant. Consistent with Marxist feminist theory, it appears that greater levels of women's income, educational attainment, occupational status, and labor market participation are significantly related to lower rape rates. The results indicate that in the tradition of the Schwendingers' (1983) work, as well as Peterson and Bailey's (1988) and Smith and Bennett's (1985) findings,¹¹ absolute status and resource deprivation are two of the most important variables to focus on when explaining rape rates. These findings also in part mirror Bailey's (1999) finding that the higher women's median income is in a city, the lower the rape rate.¹²

Finally, the present study also contributes to advancing the empirical tests of these theoretical concepts by employing data reduction techniques. The use of principal components analysis allowed for the inclusion of measures that are often correlated with each other, leading to biased results. Land et al.'s (1990) seminal work illustrates that principle components analysis is highly useful in reducing inconsistencies across studies by simplifying the "dimensionality" of macrolevel indicators of crime that, together, may confound the relative effects of deprivation, race, place, and in the present study, gender-specific socioeconomic status. Future research should continue to employ the use of exploratory factor analysis techniques to better measure these concepts of women's status, gender-specific inequality, and general inequality and resource deprivation in hopes of building more parsimonious, yet theoretically rigorous models.

There are several limitations to this study. First, future studies need to incorporate this updated 2000 data into longitudinal studies to examine changes in correlates of rape across the past 30 years. This may better address issues that Whaley (2001) referred to when she identified the need for a feminist model that is falsifiable by disentangling the backlash and ameliorative effects. In short, a more clearly defined temporal order may help identify how a backlash and an ameliorative effect may coexist within one model explaining rape. Furthermore, only longitudinal analysis will aid in identifying in what socioeconomic spheres women are achieving more parity across time (e.g., education, occupational status, income). This may better identify which factors best explain the source of gender gains that are the most threatening to the maintenance of patriarchy.

Second, future studies should address the limitations associated with using the UCR rape rate for the dependent variable. Obtaining adequate and reliable measures for macrolevel studies is often difficult. We hope that in the future, the limits of using a dependent variable that does not adequately represent the prevalence of rape will be diminished with the expansion of city-level National Incident-Based Reporting System crime data.

Microlevel studies assessing men's perceptions of women's gains would also complement this line of inquiry. There have been many studies done to assess adherence to cultural supports for rape (Burt, 1980; Scully, 1990), but more studies need to be conducted examining gender norms and expectations and how they may shape behavior.

In conclusion, the findings reported here indicate support for the Marxist hypothesis that in areas where women enjoy a higher absolute status, rape rates will be lower. This study also provides support for the radical feminist backlash hypothesis, which suggests that rape rates are higher in cities where women approach socioeconomic parity with men. Last, the traditional radical feminist hypothesis predicting an ameliorative effect of gender equality on rape rates was not supported. Taken together, these results indicate that moving toward a more integrated socialist feminist theory of rape that identifies class and gender concerns may provide a more complete understanding of rape rates in large U.S. cities.

Appendix Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Logged mean rape rate for 1998 to 2000	1.00									
2. Women's absolute status	-.25**	1.00								
3. Gender equality	.32**	-.04	1.00							
4. Resource deprivation or affluence	.39**	-.56**	.41**	1.00						
5. Logged % Black population	.40**	-.23**	.51**	.54**	1.00					
6. Logged % Hispanic population	-.27**	-.15*	-.10	-.01	-.33**	1.00				
7. % Females divorced	.30**	.07	.07	-.07	.15*	-.30**	1.00			
8. % Young (ages 18 to 34)	.14*	.06	.31**	.31**	.09	.01	-.32**	1.00		
9. Percent population change 1990 to 2000	-.21**	.27**	-.30**	-.43**	-.30**	.23**	-.08	-.08	1.00	
10. Logged population density	-.20**	-.03	.20**	.20**	-.05	.36**	-.30**	.08	-.18**	1.00
<i>M</i>	4.34	-.00	.00	.00	2.23	2.42	12.11	31.44	15.52	8.11
<i>SD</i>	.66	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.32	1.14	2.34	4.76	27.73	.71

Note: $N = 238$.

* $p = .05$ (two-tailed). ** $p = .01$ (two-tailed).

Notes

1. For a more complete discussion of the various strains of feminist thought and practice, see Bryson (2003), Eisenstein (1979, 1993), and Jaggar (1988).

2. For a more in-depth discussion of the cultural and sociopolitical forces behind the feminization of poverty, see Ollenburger and Moore (1992) and Thomas (1994).

3. In these studies, the concept of occupational prestige is measured as the percentage of females in managerial and executive occupations.

4. Unfortunately, because of the paucity of macrolevel data sets available and the nature of the Uniform Crime Reports' (UCR) reliance on official data, stranger rape is overrepresented in tests of feminist theories.

5. Two of these studies also reported support for the backlash effect within the same models indicating support for the ameliorative effect of gender equality on rape (Bailey, 1999; Whaley, 2001). Findings for

Eschholz and Vieraitis (2004) are for the sample of all women; in the sample of White women, the ratio of White female to White male median income was positive and significant.

6. In Whaley (2001), this component of gender equality was significantly related to rape rates in 1990 but not in 1970 or 1980.

7. The rate is computed using female population rather than the total population because of the UCR definition of rape. Because the UCR defines rape as a crime against women, almost always committed by men (Greenfeld, 1997), a more accurate rape rate excludes males in the population of potential victims (Bailey, 1999).

8. The state of Illinois is not in compliance with UCR guidelines defining the crime of forcible rape. Specifically, the UCR defines forcible rape as a crime against only females. Illinois's definition includes men as victims and, as a result, is not included in UCR rape or overall violent crime figures.

9. One of the reasons the authors cite for why victims of nonstranger rapes may feel an incentive to report the incident is to gain protection against a future attack. Second, the rape reform movement and an increasing awareness of the problem of violence against women may also play a role in the increase of police notification for rape (Baumer, Felson, & Messner, 2003).

10. Our component is similar to that of Land, McCall, and Cohen (1990) in that we include poverty and the Gini index. However, we did not include median family income in our model, because we already have two income measures included that tap into this concept. We also did not include the percentage of children 18 and older not living with their parents in our data, because this is not a variable commonly associated with rape research and, as such, has never been identified as a correlate of rape rates. Finally, our deprivation-affluence component excludes percentage of Black population because this variable did not load strongly onto the component. Collinearity diagnostics also showed that maintaining percentage Black as independent of deprivation or affluence and gender equality did not result in high variance inflation ratios (VIFs; all VIFs < 2.7). Thus, theoretically, we opted to maintain percentage Black as a covariate independent of deprivation or affluence and gender equality.

11. Smith and Bennett (1985), however, do not examine gender-specific status. Their measures focus on general deprivation (poverty) and Black-White income inequality.

12. Similar results have also been interpreted to suggest that women with higher statuses are able to afford more safety and security in major cities and urban areas (Bailey, 1999). They can afford to live in gated communities or safer neighborhoods, have security alarms, and may be less likely to use public transportation. This may lend credence to Maume's (1989) conclusion that a routine activities approach helps explain rape rates.

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