

A Game of Sexual Violence:  
Rape Myths Involving College Athletes in Media Coverage

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ABSTRACT

This study explored rape mythology and racialization in the rhetoric surrounding two college athletes accused of rape: Jameis Winston, a black football player, and Brock Turner, a white swimmer. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis of 54 print articles, 27 for each case, to research media coverage of each rape accusation, trial and conviction (if applicable) from a variety of news sources to evaluate the discussion of race, the influence of sports culture, and the incorporation of rape mythology in the resulting media coverage. Specifically, this study reviews rape mythology involving perpetrator support, victim blaming and community victimization.

The discussion of sexual assault in the United States inherently includes racialization and rape mythology, but coverage of college athletes accused of rape provide insight into discourse of sexual assault, to include race, college culture and sports culture. This study found significant use of rape mythology and racialization in each case, including praise of colorblind justice in the case of Jameis Winston and suggestion that race influenced a relatively light sentencing for Brock Turner, who was convicted of three counts of sexual assault. This study provides insight into discourse of racialized sexual assault cases within sports culture.