

**FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA: UNVEILING GENDERED POWER
DYNAMICS AND THE SILENT CRISIS OF GBV AGAINST BLACK MEN BY WOMEN
IN GAUTENG.**

by

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a central concern in post-apartheid South Africa, with public discourse and policy focusing primarily on violence against women. However, false rape allegations, particularly those made against Black men, remain largely silenced and under-researched. This dissertation examines how false rape allegations against Black men in Gauteng operate within intersecting systems of race, gender, class, power, and colonial history. It argues that such allegations cannot be understood as isolated incidents, but as social and moral practices shaped by enduring colonial and patriarchal structures. The study is informed by a critical and decolonial theoretical framework drawing on Foucault's concepts of power and discipline, Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and decolonial scholarship on the colonial matrix of power. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Data was collected through an online survey of individuals aged 18 years and older in Gauteng Province, open to respondents of all genders, races, classes, and sexualities. A total of 298 responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and reflexive thematic analysis. The findings show that false rape allegations function as mechanisms of moral surveillance and social regulation, reinforced by racialised assumptions of Black male danger, hypersexuality, and criminality. Participants reported enduring stigma, reputational damage, psychological distress, and social exclusion, even where allegations were withdrawn or disproven. The study demonstrates that accusation itself operates as a form of disciplinary power that shapes behaviour, fear, and social belonging. The dissertation contributes to gender and decolonial scholarship by introducing the concept of the *Coloniality of Accusations*, which captures how

colonial modes of control continue to structure credibility, belief, and justice in democratic South Africa. It calls for more balanced approaches to GBV that protect survivors while safeguarding the rights and dignity of the accused.

Keywords: False rape allegations; gender-based violence; Black masculinities; coloniality; stigma; intersectionality; disciplinary power; moral surveillance; post-apartheid South Africa; justice.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to myself, in recognition of my hard work, commitment, and perseverance. To my younger self, this work is a reminder of how far you have come. To my future self, it is evidence of what can be achieved through dedication and effort.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my son, Melokuhle Unashe Ushe, whom I love deeply. May you be inspired to continue from where I leave off and to pursue your own goals with determination.

DECLARATION

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Exact wording of the title of the dissertation as appearing on the electronic copy submitted for examination:

False Rape Allegations in South Africa: Unveiling Gendered Power Dynamics and the Silent Crisis of GBV Against Black Men by Women in Gauteng.

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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Date: 22 January 2026

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List of Abbreviations

ANC – African National Congress

DJ – District Justice

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

GBV/F – Gender-Based Violence and Femicide

HSRC – Human Sciences Research Council

LGBTIQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and other identities

NPA – National Prosecuting Authority

SAPS – South African Police Service

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

STATSSA – Statistics South Africa

TV – Television

UN Women – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

“To understand the impact of false rape allegations on Black men, one must confront the deeply rooted stereotypes and historical injustices that continue to haunt the present.”

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness* (2010)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Harnessing Foucault’s concepts of power, discourse, and governmentality (1977; 1978; 1991), Connell’s theory of hegemonic and marginalised masculinities (1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and Crenshaw’s framework of intersectionality (1989; 1991), this study investigates false rape allegations against Black men in Gauteng province, South Africa. It seeks to understand how these allegations emerge, how they are experienced by those accused, and what they reveal about broader gendered and racialised power relations. The study argues that such allegations function as disciplinary tools that regulate male behaviour and reinforce existing hierarchies of gender and race. Through this focus, the research contributes to ongoing debates about gender justice by highlighting a neglected dimension of violence, one that targets men but remains deeply embedded in patriarchal and colonial systems.

Gender based violence (GBV hereafter) is a serious public health problem that affects individuals and communities across the world, and South Africa is among the countries most severely affected. GBV refers to violence directed against a person based on their

sex or gender, encompassing acts that cause emotional, physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, including threats, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty (Ogorugba, 2021). GBV can manifest as psychological, physical, and/or sexual violence perpetrated or condoned within the family, the general community, or by the state and its institutions. South Africa has often been described as the ‘rape capital of the world’, a phrase that captures the extent and intensity of sexual violence within its borders (Machisa, Christofides & Jewkes, 2016; South African Medical Research Council [SAMRC], 2018). This situation highlights the urgent need for stronger and more comprehensive efforts to address GBV and its deep impact on physical, mental, and social well-being. GBV is one of South Africa’s most urgent public health and human rights concerns. According to SAPS crime statistics, 41,739 rape cases were recorded in South Africa between April 2021 and March 2022, though many more cases are believed to go unreported (SAPS 2022; Egenasi et al. 2024). South Africa has been consistently identified in national and international reports as one of the most dangerous countries for women, with extremely high rates of femicide and GBV (UN Women 2024; HSRC 2024; SAPS 2023/24). Recent crime data further show that 5,578 women were murdered in the year ending March 2024, exposing the severity of the country’s femicide crisis (SAPS 2024; Parliament of South Africa 2024). By late 2025, civil society organisations and international observers described GBV and femicide as a national disaster, with ongoing protests and advocacy highlighting that approximately 15 women are killed every day in South Africa (Amnesty International 2025; The Guardian 2025)

South Africa is reported to have the highest statistics of GBV in the world, including rape and domestic violence (Onyejekwe, 2004). In the article *South Africa’s Second*

Pandemic, President Ramaphosa characterised the country's GBV and femicide crisis as “a second pandemic” (Ramaphosa 2019). To add to that, according to Amnesty International (2022) during the 2020/21 financial year, femicide in South Africa increased by 4.7%, resulting in the murder of 2,655 women. To put this into perspective, it means that one woman is killed every three hours in South Africa (Ellis, 2020). These alarming statistics reveal significant impacts that GBV have on health, societal well-being, and economic productivity (End GBV Africa, 2021). While progress toward gender equality in leadership and economic participation in South Africa is evident, it remains slow. According to the 2022-2023 Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) Report, women occupy 25.3% of top management roles and 35.8% of senior management positions in the private sector. This ongoing underrepresentation, despite legislative frameworks like the Employment Equity Act and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act, highlights that true gender parity in leadership is still a challenge (Just Share, 2023; Stats SA, 2023).

While these statistics are indeed factual and important, another silent crisis in South Africa unfolds beneath the surface: the growing phenomenon of false rape allegations against men, particularly Black men. Statistics on men suffering from GBV at the hands of women remain limited to not available, making it difficult to quantify this phenomenon in South Africa (Stats SA 2018; HSRC 2024). While the nation, either through activism or scholarly discussions, rightly confronts the brutal reality of violence against women, the experiences of men who are falsely accused remain largely invisible. Although the scale of these allegations is relatively small compared to the prevalence of sexual violence against women, its social consequences are profound, highlighting an urgent

need to explore this arguably overlooked aspect of GBV (Rumney 2006; Lisak et al. 2010). It exposes the enduring racial and gendered stereotypes that define certain men as inherently violent, hypersexual, and morally suspect (Gqola 2015; Ratele 2016). This reveals not only personal suffering, but also the persistence of deeper social hierarchies that continue to shape power, race, and gender relations in the post-apartheid era. There exist various strands of thought that attempt to explain public anxieties about false rape allegations against Black men. One line of argument links these concerns to broader shifts in gendered power relations, particularly the increasing empowerment of women in social, economic and political spheres (Connell 2009; Ridgeway 2011). The growing representation of women in corporate and leadership positions marks significant progress in redressing historical gender inequalities and is widely recognised as a positive development (Sandberg 2013; Catalyst 2020). However, some scholars argue that these changing dynamics can also provoke fears of role reversal or male displacement, leading to claims that women's increased agency may enable new forms of power misuse (Faludi 1991; Kimmel 2017). Within this discourse, critics contend that false rape allegations can be used as tools of retaliation or influence, even though empirical evidence consistently shows that such cases constitute a small minority of reported sexual offences (Rumney 2006; Lisak et al. 2010). In the South African context, there have been notable incidents that fuel these anxieties, including the conviction of two women in Mpumalanga for fabricating rape allegations (IOL 2020), and the widely publicised case of three Black men who were falsely accused and detained before charges were withdrawn (News24 2022). Nevertheless, it remains crucial to emphasise that while these cases are serious and socially consequential, they do not

represent the majority of rape reports in South Africa and must be understood within the broader empirical reality of pervasive sexual violence against women.

In the post-apartheid landscape of South Africa, GBV is often analyzed and viewed as a series of isolated criminal events rather than a systemic atmospheric condition. However, following Sharpe (2016: 134), this study conceptualizes anti-blackness as the foundational weather of society, representing a total climate that precedes and produces the specific vulnerabilities of Black bodies. In this context, the weather refers to the pervasive anti-black sentiment that makes the Black male body an always-already site of suspicion. Consequently, false rape allegations are not merely legal errors but are manifestations of a social climate where Black men are permanently positioned in the wake of colonial and apartheid-era criminalization (Sharpe 2016: 102). By recognizing anti-blackness as the pervasive environment, this dissertation moves beyond traditional sociological analysis to examine how this climate dictates whose testimony is believed and whose existence is treated as a public health threat.

Internationally, similar concerns have been raised. In India, for instance, some scholars and legal analysts have highlighted the possibility of women misusing legal provisions intended for their protection to retaliate on men that may have wronged them, prompting calls for more balanced and equal safeguards (International Journal of Human Rights Law Review, 2023). Furthermore, coordinated gendered disinformation campaigns have also been observed globally, aiming to discredit and discourage women's public

participation and demonstration showing that empowerment is sometimes met with backlash and distortion (Georgetown Security Studies Review, 2024). While the possibility of misuse by some women exists, it should not be overstated or used to undermine genuine efforts toward gender equality. According to the Daily Maverick (2022), while false allegations do occur, they are often exaggerated in public discourse and weaponized against broader movements aimed at supporting women and victims of GBV. The misuse of empowerment initiatives, whether by individuals or systems, should be addressed with transparency and accountability.

To understand the foremost drivers of false rape allegations against men and the overall persistence of GBV in South Africa, it is crucial that we seriously consider the historical and post-colonial contexts as these reveal the intersection of historical oppression, gender inequality, and societal transformation (Fester, 2017; Ratele, 2016). This perspective not only highlights the structural and historical roots of contemporary issues but also underscores the need to critically engage with the ways in which colonial legacies continue to influence power dynamics and social behaviors in post-colonial societies. As mentioned above, GBV is a persistent issue in South Africa, and is deeply rooted in social, economic, and cultural factors (Ellis, 2020). Postcolonial theory offers a critical framework to analyze how historical, social, and cultural forces continue to shape the fabric of South African society. As Bhabha (1994) explains, *post-colonial* societies are marked by lingering power imbalances, cultural dislocation, and identity struggles that persist long after the formal end of colonial rule. Within this broader framework, Mbembe (2001) introduces the concept of the *postcolony*, a more specific lens through which to understand the internal, lived realities of postcolonial states like

South Africa. The *postcolony* is characterized by the continuation of violence, authoritarian structures, and colonial modes of control within ostensibly democratic and independent contexts. These overlapping frameworks reveal that in South Africa, colonial violence was not eradicated with independence; instead, it became embedded within the post-apartheid state's institutions and social relationships, continuing to shape dynamics of power, gender, and justice.

The colonial and apartheid systems constructed racialised hierarchies that positioned Black men as threats to social order, while White men occupied the position of rational authority. Fanon (1963) highlights the psychological scars left by colonialism, including internalized inferiority and displaced aggression; factors that help explain the high incidence of GBV in post-apartheid South Africa. Mamdani (1996) further exposes how apartheid institutionalized racial hierarchies and normalized violence as a mode of control, producing a society where patriarchal dominance and socio-economic marginalization remain deeply entrenched. Thus, critically engaging with both the *post-colonial* and *postcolony* frameworks allows for a deeper understanding of how colonial histories continue to inform gendered violence and justice in South Africa today.

Despite the transition to democracy in 1994, these hierarchies did not disappear; they evolved into new forms that continue to shape perceptions of crime, sexuality, and morality. As Bhabra (2014) notes, the post-colony is not simply what follows colonialism, but a space where colonial histories and global inequalities still determine social and political realities. South Africa therefore remains a post-colonial state in which colonial power relations are re-articulated through modern institutions and

everyday life, albeit through annotated and covert ways that often make such power relations escape the gaze of surface-level analytics and conceptually untrained eyes.

Scholars have defined false rape allegations and have argued that a rape allegation should only be classified as “false” when there is credible, affirmative evidence showing that the complainant knowingly reported an event that did not occur. It is for that reason that scholars such as Lonsway, Archambault & Lisak, (2009) Kelly, Lovett & Regan, (2005); Heenan & Murray, (2006); Rumney, (2006) and Lisak et al., (2010) have demonstrated in their work that the categorization and definition of false rape allegation cases ought to be “proven to be factually false,” noting that this determination cannot be based on case withdrawal, lack of evidence, or prosecutorial decisions. Similarly, Kelly, Lovett and Regan (2005) describe false allegations as those that are “demonstrably false,” meaning that the alleged offence is shown not to have occurred. Heenan and Murray (2006) explain that such cases must involve a complainant who knew the allegation was untrue at the time of reporting, while Rumney (2006) highlights that false allegations entail deliberate fabrication rather than misunderstanding, confusion, or external pressure. This study applies the definition of false rape allegations as argued by the scholars above.

It is within this context that these scholarly interpretations indicate that false rape allegations are characterised by intentional deception, requiring verifiable evidence that the complainant fabricated the claim. Furthermore, it can be argued that they are conceptually distinct from cases that are withdrawn, inconsistently reported, unsubstantiated, or discontinued by the state, as these outcomes commonly arise from

trauma, fear, social pressure, or evidentiary difficulty, rather than dishonesty. Prominently, false allegations also differ fundamentally from instances in which a suspect denies involvement in a reported offence. A denial reflects a response to an existing claim and does not constitute evidence that the allegation was fabricated. In contrast, false rape allegations involve proactive, conscious misrepresentation by the complainant. Thus, in this study, the term “false rape allegations” is used exclusively to describe cases where there is credible, affirmative evidence that the complainant knowingly, intentionally and conscientiously fabricated and performed an untrue account of a rape incident.

Therefore, understanding false rape allegations requires contextual examination and analysis of how power is performed and continues to operate through a multilayered form of discourse (political, social, media) and socially constructed structures. It is for that reason that Mignolo’s (2017) argument becomes imperative in understanding the forms of the modern state withing the the *colonial matrix of power*. Furthermore, such a system as a form of power functions as a technology that intersects knowledge, economy, race, class, gender, and subjectivity. In this sense, efforts to ‘decolonise’ or ‘democratise’ South African society must recognise how coloniality persist in present-day practices of governance, law, and representation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) problematises the notion of “postcolonial” state, by arguing that Africa’s so-called post-colonial reality is still defined by its place within the *global colonial matrix of power*. As mentioned above, this idea shows how colonialism did not simply end with political independence but continues to shape modern power relations and social inequalities. This geopolitical/economic/social/racialized/decolonial/Africana critical thought scholars

have labelled such a state as the 'coloniality of being'/'the zone of nonbeing'. Similarly, Maldonado-Torres's (2007) notion of the 'coloniality of being', which is a deep-seated condition in which both men and women remain entangled in systems of dehumanising power, explains how colonialism changed the very sense of existence for colonised people. Borrowing from Fanon (1952), it is within the 'zone of none being'/subaltern that the imposed way of life in which many were denied full humanity, creating lasting feelings of inferiority and social fragmentation that persist long after colonial rule.

In South Africa, this legacy means that both Black men and women continue to live within systems of thought and practice that divide and devalue them, affecting how they relate to each other and to the world around them. These historical and psychological wounds continue to influence current struggles for power and recognition. As Black women seek equality and social justice, Black men are sometimes viewed as barriers to that progress. This dynamic can create new forms of tension and mistrust between groups that are both victims of colonial oppression (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2004). This struggle for power results in what Steve Biko describes as the condition of the Black man as an "empty shell...a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity." Biko (1978, p. 29), which echoes Fanon's (1952) concept of the "zone of nonbeing". This image captures the deep psychological and social damage caused by centuries of racial oppression, reflecting how apartheid stripped Black men of dignity, confidence, and agency, leaving behind a sense of emptiness and alienation that continues to shape their lives long after formal segregation ended.

In such a context, the intersection of historical oppression and current gender, class, race politics can manifest in different ways, including the rise of false rape allegations against Black men, particularly in South Africa, which can be seen as part of a broader struggle for control, dignity, and recognition within a society still marked by colonial hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1991). Within the *postcolony*, violence is not only systemic but symbolic; shaped by long-standing narratives that construct Black masculinity as dangerous, hypersexual, and criminal (Mbembe, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Coloniality as a form of power that transmutes itself thus continues to persist today, in instances where some false rape allegations against Black men may (un)consciously draw on these entrenched tropes. While not widespread, such cases must be understood as part of a broader socio-political landscape where power, race, class and gender intersect. It could be postulated that as women increasingly gain access to education, employment, and public life, shifting gender dynamics may provoke new tensions. In some instances, this shift has led to the misuse of institutional power, where false rape allegations emerge as tools in broader struggles over control, recognition, or retaliation. While at the same time there are phenomena that are labeled as *mavuso*¹ and *slayqueens*².

The above phenomena points to the body as a form of power. Borrowing from Burchart's concept of the theatre and that of Mbembe of necropolitics, it can be argued that these forms of power have to be socially and epistemologically located within the

¹ *Mavuso can be loosely translated as to awaken someone. This occurs when a woman has had sexual activities with a man and in the morning demands money for sex. This can be categorized as transactional sex without both parties agreement prior.*

² *Slayqueens are generally categorized as sophisticated women who engage in sophisticated forms of transactional sex.*

global colonial matrix of power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2013) maintains that while we acknowledge how the said matrix of power has placed men on the pedestal of systematic subjugation of the female bodies, Black men continue to bear the symbolic burden of criminality and danger, a burden that shapes how accusations of sexual violence are interpreted by the public and by institutions of justice. Such an often-overlooked fact indeed, although uncomfortably and ironically, portrays particularly Black men as victims of the very colonial and patriarchal system that has afforded them power over the female body. It is against this background that this study investigates false rape allegations against Black men in Gauteng, South Africa. The study is informed by three complementary theoretical perspectives: Foucault's (1977; 1978; 1991) concepts of power, discourse, and governmentality Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic and marginalised masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and Crenshaw's (1989; 1991). framework of intersectionality

Foucault's (1978) work explains how institutions and discourses construct "truths" that discipline bodies and shape subjectivities. At the same time, Connell's (1995), theory clarifies how ideals of manhood are structured in ways that privilege some men while excluding others, particularly along racial and class lines. While Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality exposes how race, gender, and class interact to produce complex forms of inequality. Together, these theories provide an integrated lens for examining how false rape allegations reflect and reproduce power, discipline, and inequality within South African society.

Building on these perspectives, the research adopts a critical and decolonial epistemology that views knowledge as historically situated and shaped by relations of power. It values lived experience as a legitimate source of understanding, and it recognises the need to challenge dominant, Eurocentric narratives about gender and violence. In doing so, it borrows from African thinkers like Fanon, Mbembe, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Mothoagae, Ratele to name but a few. This positioning informs the study's qualitative design, guiding both data collection and analysis toward uncovering how the interplay of discourse, identity, and power intersect in the lives of falsely accused Black men.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

GBV, especially sexual violence such as rape, is one of South Africa's most serious social problems. Recently, at the G20 summit, the President of the Republic of South Africa declared GBV/F as a national disaster. As result most reported cases involve men abusing women or children, and this has shaped laws, policies, and public awareness campaigns. However, very little attention has been given to false rape allegations, especially when the accused are Black men. While there is close to no complete national data, as of this study, on how often these false allegations occur, media reports and public debates show that they do occur (The Citizen, 2019; IOL, 2022; Hidden War Project, 2021). Well-known cases involving figures such as Mduduzi Manana, comedian Tol Ass-Mo, and footballer Thembinkosi Lorch have shown how damaging such allegations can be for a person's reputation, mental health, and career. These high-profile examples raise an important question: what about the many ordinary Black men whose cases are never heard or believed? At the same time, it has to be

argued that some high-profile personalities such as Pastor Omotoso³, former Minister Melusi Gigaba⁴ have used pastoral and political power as technologies of exploiting young and vulnerable Black women.

A major problem in current discussions on GBV is that Blackness is often treated only as a demographic category rather than a deeper political and social condition. In this study, Blackness is understood through the idea of the Racial Contract. Charles W. Mills argues that the Racial Contract is a historical system in which non-white people are treated as less than fully human (Mills 1997: 11). In the South African context, Blackness becomes a marker of exclusion and inequality. From this perspective, false rape allegations can function as a tool that reinforces racist ideas by portraying Black men as morally and intellectually inferior while protecting the structural biases within the legal system (Mills 1997: 59).

In addition, Sylvia Wynter explains Blackness as a way of being that has been excluded from Western ideas of what it means to be fully human (Wynter 2003: 260). Within this colonial way of thinking, Black men are often positioned as dangerous or threatening figures against which ideas of civilization and safety are defined. This helps explain why accusations of rape against Black men are often quickly believed by society, because Black male identity has historically been associated with danger and criminality (Wynter 2003: 268). Therefore, understanding Blackness requires examining how colonial history has constructed the Black body as naturally criminal, making false allegations

³ Pastor Omotoso was accused and is facing charges of sexual exploitation of young women through performing his pastoral powers. Though acquitted, the State is appealing his release.

⁴ Melusi Gigaba trended on social media after sharing a video of his private part with a young woman.

part of a broader system of dehumanization. To further understand this issue, it is important to look at South Africa's history. Under apartheid, the legal system often ignored or downplayed sexual violence against Black women, while at the same time portraying Black men as dangerous and overly sexual. These harmful stereotypes were spread by both White women and White men (Oxfam, 1994; Armstrong, 1999). Many of these ideas still exist today and can influence how people think about sexual offences and justice.

In post-apartheid South Africa, gender roles have been changing. More women are taking leadership positions and entering professional spaces, but these changes sometimes clash with traditional patriarchal norms. Some researchers such as Buiten & Naidoo (2013), argue that when women's progress challenges male dominance, it can cause tension or resistance. Furthermore, in rare cases, some women may use false rape allegations as a way of fighting back or gaining control in personal or social conflicts. In some instances, these cases do not represent all women, they can have serious effects: they can make it harder for real victims of GBV to be believed, they can deepen mistrust between genders, and they can harm progress towards gender equality (Gender Security Project, 2023).

It is within this context that this study focuses on false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa. It explored how common they are, why they happen, and how they are connected to the country's history, to the power relations between men and women, and to the ongoing social change. It will also centre on the personal experiences of men who have been falsely accused, aiming to bring attention to a topic that is often ignored.

In doing so, the study hopes to support fairer policies, reduce stigma, and build a justice system that both protects real survivors and ensures the rights of the falsely accused.

1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Globally, scholarship on rape and sexual violence has extensively documented the challenges of reporting, investigating, and prosecuting rape, yet research on false rape allegations remains limited and uneven. International studies consistently highlight the difficulty of establishing accurate prevalence rates, the reputational and psychological harms endured by the falsely accused, and the role of legal and media institutions in shaping outcomes (Rumney, 2006; Lisak et al., 2010; Spohn & Tellis, 2014). However, even within this scholarship, a major conceptual gap persists: most studies focus on GBV against women, leaving minimal space to theorise how men, particularly disadvantaged men, can also experience gendered harm through strategically mobilised accusations. In addition, very few global studies examine the racialised dimensions of false allegations or connect them to colonial histories that have long criminalised Black masculinities. Critical race and postcolonial scholars show that Black men have historically been imagined as hypersexual, violent, and inherently suspect (Davis, 1981; Muhammad, 2010; Alexander, 2012), yet these insights are rarely extended to understanding how such stereotypes shape contemporary allegations of rape. This absence leaves significant gaps in literature, particularly around how race, gender, and power intersect to produce vulnerability for Black men. It is within this global silence that the present study positions itself, offering an intersectional and decolonial approach to understanding false rape allegations as a global problem with specific manifestations in South Africa.

South Africa possesses one of the most robust bodies of research on rape, attrition, and GBV, driven by the country's extraordinarily high levels of sexual violence (Artz, 2007; Vetten, 2014; Smythe, 2015; Machisa et al., 2023). However, despite this extensive work, scholarship overwhelmingly focuses on violence perpetrated by men, rarely examining instances where allegations may be false or where men experience harm. Consequently, a substantial empirical gap remains. To my knowledge at the time of this study, it could be postulated that there is almost no systematic scholarship on false rape allegations within South Africa, nor any research that centres the lived experiences of falsely accused men, particularly Black men. This is striking given the country's racialised history of constructing Black men as dangerous and predatory, narratives that continue to shape policing, credibility assessments, and public suspicion (Gqola, 2015; Ratele, 2016; Hazan & Bridger, 2021). Postcolonial theorists further show that the post-apartheid state still bears the imprint of colonial governance and its systems of surveillance (Mbembe, 2001; Mamdani, 1996; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013), yet these insights have not been applied to studying false allegations. Thus, despite the richness of South Africa's GBV scholarship, critical gaps persist in understanding how false allegations intersect with the colonial matrix of power, racialised masculinities, and institutional responses. This study addresses these omissions by foregrounding Black men's experiences and analysing how race and postcolonial histories shape the dynamics of false rape allegations.

Moreso, studies that touch on Black masculinities have examined GBV, masculinities, and sexual politics, but they seldom address the gendered power relations that enable women to wield institutional or symbolic power through allegations against men (Mama,

1995; Hassim, 2006; Collins, 2000). In South Africa studies on false allegations is limited, with only a handful of studies acknowledging their occurrence (Buiten & Naidoo, 2013). Moreover, the literature suggests a theoretical gap, as few studies combine Foucauldian governmentality, intersectionality, and masculinities theory to interrogate the heightened vulnerability of Black men to accusations and policing. Nor has research sufficiently analysed the psychological, economic, and social consequences for falsely accused men (Maseko, 2023; Mujuzi, 2023), or the powerful role of media and social media in amplifying allegations long before judicial processes conclude. The absence of these perspectives further reinforces the silencing of Black male victimhood and the reproduction of gender binaries that imagine harm as a unidirectional male-to-female phenomenon. This study responds to these gaps by offering a theoretically grounded, empirically rich examination of false rape allegations against Black men in Gauteng, revealing how these allegations operate within broader regimes of racialised and gendered power.

In addressing the above, this study occupies a critical space in literature. By centring the lived experiences of Black men and applying a combined framework of Foucault's discourse and governmentality, Connell's masculinities, and Crenshaw's intersectionality, the study offers a deeper account of how racialised and gendered power circulates through institutions, media, and everyday interactions. Integrating insights from decolonial theorists such as Mbembe, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, and Mignolo enables the study to trace how the colonial matrix of power continues to shape the credibility, vulnerability, and subjectification of Black men within present-day South Africa. In doing so, the study not only fills critical conceptual, empirical, and theoretical

gaps, but also advances debates on spatial justice (Soja, 2010) and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989) by demonstrating how false rape allegations function as technologies of social regulation. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more balanced and historically grounded understanding of GBV, expands the discourse to include overlooked forms of male victimisation, and provides a foundation for more just institutional responses that protect both genuine survivors and those who are falsely accused.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

False rape allegations against Black men in South Africa are influenced by the intersections of historical colonial and apartheid-era power structures, and contemporary shifts in gender dynamics that reflect in the enduring impact of the colonial matrix of power on gendered relations and social perceptions.

This hypothesis suggests that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, manifested through systemic inequalities and social hierarchies that have historically disadvantaged Black men, may intersect with the present-day shifts in gender roles and power dynamics, potentially contributing to a complex social environment in which false rape allegations could arise.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Decolonial Logic: Epistemic Disobedience

This dissertation intentionally follows what Mignolo (2009: 160). calls “epistemic disobedience”. The study focuses on the often-overlooked issue of false rape

allegations against Black men and challenges Eurocentric ideas of knowledge that assume researchers can be completely neutral or detached (Grosfoguel 2007: 214). Following Ramón Grosfoguel, this study recognizes that all knowledge is shaped by power relations and social context (Grosfoguel 2007: 211). For this reason, the analytical approach of this dissertation deliberately rejects traditional forms of knowledge production that have historically ignored or silenced marginalized voices.

By adopting epistemic disobedience, the researcher rejects the colonial expectation of objectivity, as such objectivity has often contributed to the erasure of Black lived experiences and knowledge systems (Mignolo 2009: 173). As a result, the strong analytical language used in this study forms part of a deliberate decolonial approach that seeks to challenge the silencing of the racialized and gendered experiences of Black men in South Africa.

1.6 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this study is to examine how gendered and racialised power dynamics shape the causes, lived experiences, and consequences of false rape allegations made by women against Black men in South Africa. In line with this aim, the study seeks to answer the central research question:

How do gendered and racialised power dynamics influence the causes, experiences, and consequences of false rape allegations made by women against Black men in South Africa?

To address this question, the study pursues the following objectives:

- To explore the possible causes of false rape allegations made by women against Black men.
- To investigate community narratives relating to the consequences, if any, faced by women who falsely accuse Black men of rape.
- To examine the psychosocial impacts of false rape accusations on Black men and the strategies they use to cope and resist. To examine how false rape allegations shape the behaviours, identities, and everyday experiences of Black men in South Africa.

1.7 CONCLUSION

Overall, this chapter has shown that false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa cannot be understood outside the broader crisis of GBV or the country's history of colonialism and apartheid. These historical legacies continue to shape social inequalities and gender relations, creating a context where shifting roles and tensions may contribute to false allegations. The discussion highlighted how such allegations not only harm the men accused but can also weaken public trust in genuine cases of sexual violence. Drawing on Foucault's ideas on power and the colonial matrix of power, the study positions these allegations as products of deeper struggles over justice, identity, and authority in post-apartheid South Africa.

Building on this foundation, the next chapter reviews the key theories and existing literature that frame this study. It explores how scholars have explained the

intersections of gender, power, race, and justice, and how these perspectives can help make sense of false rape allegations in the South African context.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"Power and knowledge directly imply one another... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge."

Foucault (1975 p.27)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews existing literature on false rape allegations, with a particular focus on their impact on Black men in South Africa. It achieves this through a thematic discussion of said literature. It begins with the historical construction of Black masculinity during colonialism and apartheid, showing how stereotypes of Black men as violent and hypersexual continue to influence society today. It then turns to international research on false rape allegations, focusing on the prevalence, causes and consequences of false rape allegations. The discussion then narrows to the South African context, focusing on research about the justice system, police investigations, court processes, and public debates on false accusations. While doing so, the chapter goes further to examine how false rape allegations are connected to gendered power relations in both platonic and intimate relationships, including the use of accusations as tools of control, retaliation, or protection of reputation. It considers how mental health challenges, feminist debates, and the role of the media further shape the way false rape allegations are understood. Through these discussions, the chapter highlights key gaps in the existing literature, particularly a dearth in studies focusing on Black men as victims of false rape allegations in South Africa, particularly Gauteng province, the

physical site of this study. By doing so, the chapter sets the foundation for why this study is needed and how it contributes to ongoing debates about gender, race, and power in South Africa.

2.2 HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Understanding false rape allegations in South Africa requires looking at how ideas about Black masculinity were historically constructed and controlled. Butchart (1998:94) refers to this process as “inventing an economy of human bodies,” where the bodies of Black men were examined, categorised, and disciplined through systems such as medicine, science, and the law. During colonialism and apartheid, these systems treated Black men’s bodies as objects of control, often linking them to disease, danger, and criminality.

A major tool for this control was the creation of rigid racial categories. The Population Registration Act, 1950 (Act 30 of 1950) which was enacted by the National Party government and administered by the Minister of the Interior, institutionalised racial classification by requiring every person to be registered and assigned to a racial group, defining these groups through explicitly subjective criteria such as appearance and “general acceptance” within a community, for example classifying a White person as one “who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person” (s 1(xv)). In this way, the Act embedded appearance, behaviour, and social recognition into the legal construction of race (Posel, 2001). This ‘taxonomic gaze’ fixed racial

identities and turned flexible, lived experiences into permanent labels. In this way, the state used classification to maintain power and social order.

Within these structures, Black men were often portrayed as hypersexual, dangerous, and naturally violent. These stereotypes justified racial segregation, harsh policing, and public fear. Gqola (2015) argues that public discussions about rape during apartheid reinforced these ideas: Black men were seen as constant threats, while the sexual violence of White men was ignored. This created a racial double standard: Black men were presumed guilty and White men were rarely held accountable. Similarly, Armstrong (1999) and Sithole (2022) adds that these myths legitimised the over-policing of Black communities, while Hazan and Bridger (2021) argue that the public doubts about women's credibility did not extend to cases involving Black men, who were long assumed guilty almost automatically.

Literature suggests, as explained in the previous chapter, that today's false rape allegations cannot be separated from these historical patterns. Rumney (2006) and Rumney and McCartan (2017), though writing in the United Kingdom (UK) context, point out that false allegations often gain traction when they confirm existing social stereotypes. In South Africa, these stereotypes are deeply racialized, linking Black masculinity to violence and sexual danger. Bridger (2021) adds that stories about sexual threat were historically used to restrict both women's sexuality and Black men's freedom, and modern false allegations can repeat those same power dynamics.

2.3 COLONIAL LEGAL FLEXIBILITY AND THE COENRAAD APPEL CASE (1775 STELLENBOSCH)

The racialised foundations of South Africa's sexual-legal order can be traced to the eighteenth-century Cape Colony, where cases such as *The Landdrost of Stellenbosch v Coenraad Appel and Elsje Anna Meyburgh* (1775) illuminate how White men's sexual violence was normalised through legal re-categorisation. Archival proceedings from the Court of Justice in Cape Town (CJ 57, 1775) reveal that Appel, a White farmer, was charged not with rape but with incest, after impregnating his stepdaughter, the young Elsje Anna Meyburgh. Testimonies from enslaved witnesses demonstrate that coercion and abuse were evident, yet colonial law refused to name the act as sexual violation.

One enslaved woman, Philida van de Caab, testified on 25 January 1775 that "the said Elsje did weep bitterly and told me she had been forced by her stepfather to lie with him" (CJ 57: Philida van de Caab Deposition, 1775). Another witness, Louis van Madagascar, confirmed "he had often seen the girl much afflicted and the master going to her chamber at night" (1/STB 3/11, 1775). Despite these accounts, the Court reframed the offence as incestuous cohabitation, treating it as a moral breach rather than a criminal assault. The judgment described Appel's conduct as "a most abominable act of immorality within his household, deserving of correction for scandal and disorder" (CJ 57, Sentence of 20 April 1775). In effect, sexual coercion was moralised rather than criminalised, confirming the elasticity of colonial jurisprudence when White male respectability was at stake.

Van der Spuy (1996, p. 18) observes that “the court was more troubled by the erosion of patriarchal authority than by the violence inflicted upon a dependent woman.” The verdict protected racial hierarchy by distinguishing between immorality and crime, reserving the latter category primarily for Black and enslaved men. As Worden (1985) notes, under Roman-Dutch law, enslaved men could be executed for rape, even when the complainant was another enslaved woman, yet White masters’ sexual access to enslaved or Khoisan women was treated as a private matter of discipline. This selective moralism exemplified what Mbembe (2001) later called the ‘grammar of domination’ in the colony, where law functioned simultaneously as spectacle and as shield for White sovereignty.

The Appel proceedings also illustrate the epistemic limits placed on enslaved testimony. Although multiple enslaved witnesses corroborated Elsje’s distress, their statements were recorded with cautionary phrases such as “the slave woman asserts but cannot swear to the truth” (CJ 57, Record of Evidence, 1775). The phrase rendered Black voices legally audible yet epistemically void. Their knowledge counted as narrative, not as proof. This exclusion reveals what Maldonado-Torres (2007) terms the colonality of being: Black and enslaved subjects were present in the archive but ontologically disqualified from truth-telling.

By contrast, when enslaved men were accused of sexual transgression, the law operated with swift certainty. Shell (1994, p. 212) documents a 1769 case at the Cape in which an enslaved man, Andries van Bengal, of South Asian origin, was executed for the alleged rape of an enslaved woman despite the absence of corroborating evidence.

The contrast between Andries, whose enslaved status and non-European origin rendered him presumptively guilty, and Coenraad Appel, whose Whiteness invited moral reinterpretation, exposes the racialised asymmetrical colonial justice. In both cases, the line between crime and sin was drawn through a hierarchy in which European Whiteness was protected and enslaved people of colour were expendable.

This legal flexibility helps explain how the colonial system shaped what this study calls the *coloniality of accusations*. In the Cape Colony, an accusation was not a neutral legal act. It was a racial tool used to decide whose word carried weight and whose did not. The law did more than settle disputes; it created a hierarchy of belief in which White men were seen as truthful and powerful, while Black people and enslaved men were viewed with suspicion. As Foucault (1977) reminds us, power and knowledge are linked; the colonial courtroom was a place where bodies were controlled through language and judgement. In the Appel case, legal discourse turned rape into “incest,” coercion into “moral weakness,” and violence into “fatherly error.” This shows how colonial law used language to protect White men and to disguise acts of domination.

The Appel case therefore marks an early moment when White men’s sexual behaviour was justified using moral language, while Black men’s actions were criminalised through legal punishment. This pattern continued through Apartheid and can still be seen today. The old racial ideas that shaped colonial justice continue to influence how rape accusations are understood. When Black men are accused of rape, they are often judged through stereotypes that present them as dangerous or guilty by nature. When

White or powerful men are accused, their actions are more easily excused as mistakes, misunderstandings, or moral lapses.

The racial and gendered logic of the Cape Colony thus laid the foundation for how accusation still works in South Africa. Under colonial law, who could accuse, who could be accused, and who could be believed depended on race, class, and gender. The Coenraad Appel case (1775) shows that White men's sexual wrongdoing was treated as "immorality" or "incest," while similar acts by Black or enslaved men were labelled "rape" and punished harshly (Van der Spuy, 1996; Shell, 1994; Worden, 1985). This double standard turned violence into virtue for some, and virtue into violence for others. It built racial hierarchy into the very structure of justice.

A similar pattern persisted well beyond the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) period, becoming entrenched across the nineteenth century. In the Kat River sexual-assault trials (1846–48), for example, Khoekhoe men were swiftly convicted in cases such as *R v. Kibi* (Case No. 14/1847) and *R v. Booï* (Case No. 22/1848) despite inconsistent testimony, while comparable charges against white men were dismissed or reframed as matters of "immorality" rather than crime (Scully, 1997). This asymmetry sharpened later in the century. In *State v. Magoda* (Eastern Districts Court, 1873; Case No. EDC 32/1873), an African man was executed for attempted rape on contradictory evidence, the judge explicitly invoking racialized assumptions about African male sexuality (Martens, 2016). Similar trends appear across the Cape Supreme Court's rape dockets of the 1870s–1890s, such as *R v. Jantjes* (CSC 71/1883), where African and

Khoekhoe defendants faced harsh custodial sentences while white defendants received mitigated or non-criminal classifications (Van Heyningen, 1985; Newton-King, 1999).

This logic intensified in the twentieth century, particularly under the Immorality Acts. In *R v. Sitali* (Appellate Division, 1945; Case No. AD 10/1945), an African man was sentenced to death for the alleged rape of a white woman, despite major evidentiary contradictions; the court justified its decision by drawing on long-standing tropes of Black male sexual danger. Under the Pretoria Immorality Trials (1956–58), including *State v. Mokoena* (Transvaal Circuit Court, Case No. TCC 42/1957), Black men involved in consensual interracial relationships with white women were prosecuted as criminals, while white men accused of sexually assaulting Black women typically faced reduced or non-criminal charges under “immorality” provisions (Dubow, 1995; Martens, 2007). Together, these cases demonstrate a longitudinal and systemic pattern: across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, South African courts consistently reinterpreted the sexual transgressions of white men as lapses in morality, while construing those of men of colour as evidence of inherent criminality.

Recognising this history is important because it shows that false rape allegations in South Africa today are not new or isolated problems. They are connected to a long history in which credibility and suspicion were divided along racial lines. The following section explores this issue further by examining how false rape allegations have been discussed and understood in other parts of the world, showing how questions of power, gender, and belief continue to shape such accusations internationally.

2.4 FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

When looking at the issue of false rape allegations, it is important to begin with how the topic has been researched internationally. Much of the global literature has focused on questions such as: How often do false allegations happen? Why do they occur? How are they dealt with by the justice system? And what consequences do they bring for both the accused and for survivors of genuine sexual violence? These debates are not always simple, because what counts as a “false” allegation depends on how researchers and legal systems define it.

One of the most cited voices in this field is Rumney (2006), who reviewed studies from different countries and pointed out that reported rates of false allegations vary widely. In some police records, the figure might be as low as 2%, while in others it is recorded as high as 10% or more. Rumney warns that these numbers are often misleading because of definitional problems. For example, a case may be classified as “false” simply because there was not enough evidence to proceed, even if the allegation was never proven to be fabricated. Spohn and Tellis (2014) make a similar argument, showing that police in the United States of America (USA) sometimes “unfound” cases, meaning they close them and label them as false based on very little evidence or simply because the victim’s story was inconsistent. This suggests that the justice system itself can significantly influence the production of the category “false”.

Other researchers like Lisak et al. (2010) argue that while false allegations are not common, their effects are serious and should not be dismissed. They point out that the real harm lies in two directions: for men who are wrongly accused, the damage to their

reputation, career, and mental health can be devastating, and for survivors of genuine rape, high-profile false cases can feed scepticism and make it harder for them to be believed. This tension between protecting the rights of the accused and protecting survivors is at the heart of international debates. Kelly, Lovett, and Regan (2005) highlight this in their study for the UK Home Office, where they describe what they call the “justice gap”: many survivors see their cases dropped, while a small number of men are falsely accused and carry stigma even after being cleared. Both groups, they argue, lose faith in the system.

Temkin and Krahé (2008) explain that public attitudes and social stereotypes strongly influence how sexual violence is understood both in court and in society. Survivors are often doubted because of narrow ideas about what a “real” victim should look like or how they should behave. At the same time, men who fit racialised and gendered stereotypes, especially those portraying Black men as aggressive or deviant, are more likely to be assumed guilty. This reflects Foucault (1977; 1978) Disciplinary power, where institutions such as the courts, police, and media monitor, label, and control people’s bodies and behaviour. Through Biopower and Governmentality, Foucault (1977; 1978) argues that these systems do more than punish; they shape how society thinks about race, gender, and morality. As a result, Black masculinity is often portrayed as a legal, social and moral threat. This racialised control of life and bodies, known as ‘racial biopolitics’, operates within what Quijano (1997) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) describe as the *colonial matrix of power*, which continues to define whose humanity is recognized and whose is ignored.

Applying Mbembe's concepts of *Humanitas* and *Anthropos* Mothoagae (2021) in his article expands these concepts in explaining how these concepts function within the colonial matrix of power. He maintains that the *Humanitas* is located in the zone of being, as fully human and rational while the *Anthropos* is located in the Zone of none being is seen as incomplete human. Similarly, Mignolo and Estermann (2018) link this condition to the *coloniality of being*, in which Black men and women are denied full human recognition. They live in a world that constantly question their worth and place them at the edges of existence. This explains why Black people in postcolonial societies often face systems that undermine their dignity and limit their participation as equal subjects. Within the zone of nonbeing, Feminist and Womanist Scholars such as bell hooks, Oreyonke, Nnaemeka have argued that Black women continue to experience double oppression. this condition of dignity erosion, Black men are often perceived as impediments to women's, particularly Black women, social recognition, and as a result, they may be symbolically sacrificed or punished through mechanisms of power such as false rape allegations.

Rumney and McCartan (2017) add that false rape allegations are complex and cannot be understood only in terms of gender or sexual violence. They identify various motives behind false reports, including revenge, personal conflict, or social and financial gain. The difference between 'true' and 'false' allegations is often blurred by trauma, social pressure, and weak legal processes. This makes it difficult for courts to balance fairness and justice and in the following section I present legal precedents and case example in an international scene.

2.5 LEGAL PRECEDENTS AND CASE EXAMPLES

In addition to scholarly research, several international legal cases provide insight into how false rape allegations have been addressed across different jurisdictions and historical periods. One of the earliest and most influential is *Miller v. State* (Nevada Supreme Court, 1989), which established evidentiary boundaries for when prior false accusations may be admitted during cross-examination. The judgment emphasised the importance of safeguarding due process for the accused while preventing the unnecessary re-traumatisation of complainants (Miller v. State, 1989). What renders *Miller* especially instructive is its recognition that credibility is not merely an evidentiary question but a deeply social one: the court acknowledged that allegations of sexual harm are always interpreted through existing assumptions about gender, power and vulnerability. When placed alongside the South African cases discussed earlier, where racialised presumptions about sexuality pre-determined guilt long before evidence was assessed, *Miller* exposes the broader principle at stake. Legal responses to sexual allegations are never ideologically neutral; they reflect the hierarchies a society chooses to see as self-evident. This means that across time and place, the law's approach to sexual transgression reveals far more about the social order it protects than about the acts themselves.

Two decades later, the Duke Lacrosse case in the United States (2006–2007) revealed how race, gender, and institutional bias can converge to produce a miscarriage of justice (Whisnant, 2008). Although the accused were white male athletes and the complainant a Black woman, racial dynamics still shaped the case, public outrage drew heavily on entrenched narratives of privileged white masculinity and vulnerable Black

femininity. Gendered assumptions further framed the men as aggressive and entitled while positioning the complainant as inherently credible. The prosecutor's misconduct and the media's sensationalism amplified these biases, enabling moral panic to override evidentiary scrutiny. The case illustrates that the credibility of sexual allegations is never determined by facts alone, but by the social identities of those involved and the narratives a society is prepared to believe.

More recently, the Cyprus "Ayia Napa" case (2019–2022) exposed a different dimension of the problem, institutional coercion and procedural injustice. A British woman was initially convicted of "public mischief" after retracting a gang-rape allegation, but her conviction was later overturned by the Supreme Court of Cyprus in 2022. The European Court of Human Rights subsequently found that her right to a fair trial had been violated, noting failures such as the police's coercive interrogation practices, the absence of legal counsel during the drafting of her retraction, and the trial court's refusal to consider evidence challenging the reliability of that statement. These procedural failures illustrate how power can be exercised without balance, when investigative and judicial authorities operate without sufficient checks, transparency, or accountability, both complainants and the accused become vulnerable to institutional harm.

In the United Kingdom, the Eleanor Williams case (2022–2023) reflected the modern, digital-era challenges of false rape allegations. Williams was convicted of "perverting the course of justice" after fabricating multiple rape and trafficking claims, which she disseminated widely on social media (The Guardian, 2023). Her posts not only spread misinformation but also provoked a wave of racialised hostility as local Asian men whom

she had falsely accused were subjected to public abuse, threats, and targeted attacks, while far-right groups used her allegations to amplify anti-Muslim and anti-migrant narratives. In this context, racial tensions did not arise simply because the accused were men of colour, but because the false allegations became a catalyst for explicit racialised harassment and extremist mobilisation. The case demonstrates how digital misinformation can escalate reputational harm and destabilise community trust, with consequences that extend beyond individual actors to entire racial and ethnic groups.

Collectively, these cases illustrate an evolving international trajectory, from evidentiary caution in *Miller v. State* (1989), through racialised moral panic and prosecutorial overreach in the Duke Lacrosse case (2006–2007), to the procedural and institutional failures exposed in Ayia Napa (2019–2022), and finally to the digital misinformation and far-right mobilisation surrounding Eleanor Williams (2022–2023). Looking at them through the Foucauldian concepts, these cases reveal how institutions exercise power not only through legal sanctions but also through various forms of discourse, the systems of meaning that determine whose accounts are treated as credible, which bodies are surveilled, and what counts as “truth.” In *Miller*, evidentiary rules functioned as discursive norms governing legitimate testimony. In Duke Lacrosse, media and prosecutorial narratives constructed racialised “truths” that shaped public perception long before trial. In Ayia Napa, police interrogation practices and judicial control over admissibility illustrate how institutions shape truth through procedural authority. And in the Williams case, digital platforms and state responses show how truth is produced and circulated within a network of social-media discourse and institutional surveillance. Thus, these dynamics demonstrate that legal responses to false rape allegations are

embedded within broader regimes of power/knowledge that construct notions of justice within gendered and racialised frameworks, mirroring similar patterns identified in post-apartheid South Africa.

A good example is Botswana's 2021 legal amendment which criminalised false rape allegations. The law recognises that false accusations cause serious harm, damaging reputations, causing emotional distress, and leading to wrongful punishment (Dambe, 2024). However, as Dambe (2024) points out, such laws also raise difficult questions about whether they might discourage genuine victims from coming forward. Lawmakers describe this as a "double-edged sword," because the justice system must protect both the falsely accused and true survivors of sexual violence.

Mbembe's (2003) concept of *necropolitics* further helps to explain how these forms of power operate. He argues that some lives are valued, while others are treated as disposable. Under such conditions, Black men are often positioned within a system that exposes them to social death where their lives, dignity, and voices are devalued. False rape allegations can therefore be understood as a form of *necropolitical violence*: they not only destroy reputations but can also lead to real physical harm or even death. Dambe (2024) reports tragic cases in Botswana where false accusations have led to violence and loss of life, showing how deeply this kind of power can affect people's existence. In more recent discussions, Dambe (2024) raises concerns about laws that criminalise false rape allegations too harshly. While accountability is important, he argues, these laws can create a chilling effect, discouraging genuine survivors from coming forward out of fear they might not be believed. This raises a key dilemma: how

do societies balance the need to protect men from wrongful allegations while also ensuring that survivors are not silenced?

Combined, these international studies suggest that false rape allegations are best understood as a complex and socially shaped phenomenon. They are not simply a matter of individuals lying or telling the truth, but involve how police, courts, media, and social attitudes construct and respond to accusations. This means that false rape allegations cannot be separated from the broader systems of power and belief within a society, and this section has hopefully unpacked these issues from a global lens. In the next section, I focus on false rape allegations in South Africa.

2.6 FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

While much of the global research highlights the complexity of false rape allegations, the South African context adds unique layers because of its history of racial inequality, gendered power struggles, and a strained and arguably biased justice system that reflects hangovers from the colonial racialized past. South African scholars argue that to understand false rape allegations here, one must examine not only the act of accusation, but also how the police, courts, and communities respond.

Studies by Vetten (2014) and Smythe (2015) observe that rape reporting in South Africa is already fraught with difficulties. Many cases collapse before reaching trial, a pattern often referred to as 'case attrition'. Artz (2007) and Artz and Smythe (2007) studied these drop-off points and found that weak investigations, poor evidence gathering, and the attitudes of police officers all play a major role. This is important for false rape

allegations because a system that struggles to handle genuine cases fairly also struggles to deal with false ones. If investigations are not thorough, innocent men may be wrongfully arrested or left carrying stigma even when no evidence exists.

Sigsworth (2009), focusing specifically on Gauteng, found that the quality of police investigations was highly inconsistent. Some cases were closed quickly with little effort, while others were pursued aggressively, even with weak evidence. For men falsely accused, this meant their treatment often depended more on the biases of officers than on facts. These findings connect directly with participants in this study, who also described how police acted too quickly to arrest, reinforcing the presumption of guilt.

More recently, Machisa et al. (2023) conducted a national study and confirmed that South Africa continues to struggle with rape case attrition. They pointed out that many cases are lost in the system due to poor communication, lack of resources, and investigative bias. Although their work focuses on genuine rape cases, it shows how systemic weaknesses also create space for false allegations to thrive, as both victims and accused men face outcomes that are unjust.

Beyond the justice system, other studies highlight the reputational and emotional damage caused by false allegations. Maseko (2023), for example, studied men who had been legally exonerated but found that clearing their names in court did not restore their reputations. Many continued to face stigma in their workplaces, communities, and families. Similarly, Mujuzi (2023) examined whether South Africa provides compensation for wrongful convictions and concluded that the legal framework is too

limited, leaving acquitted men without meaningful redress. Together, these studies reveal that even when men are proven innocent, the damage is long-lasting and often irreversible.

2.7 NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST PROMINENT BLACK MEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

High-profile cases in South Africa illustrate the profound consequences of false allegations on public figures. False rape allegations against prominent Black male figures such as Mduduzi Manana, Mangaliso J. Ngema, and Tol Ass Mo highlight the severe consequences and enduring social stigma that can arise from such claims, particularly when made against Black men in South Africa's racialized and gendered socio-political context. Each case generated widespread media attention, with coverage often framing the men as guilty long before the courts reached their conclusions. Yet, even when charges were withdrawn or the accused were acquitted, the stigma of the allegations persisted (Daily Maverick, 2021; TimesLIVE, 2022).

Mduduzi Manana, a former Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training and a prominent member of the African National Congress (ANC), was accused of sexual assault in 2017. The allegations emerged following a physical altercation at a Johannesburg nightclub, where Manana admitted to slapping a woman during an argument (Sokanyile, 2017). The behaviour by Manana was unacceptable but that does not mercenarily make him a rapist. However, as later to be seen, beyond this incident, Manana was falsely accused of rape in the public discourse, though these were later proven to be unfounded. Notably, the complainant in the nightclub assault, Mandisa

Duma, was not in an intimate or romantic relationship with Manana, reinforcing that false rape allegations may also arise outside of romantic contexts, including platonic or situational interactions (TimesLIVE, 2017). This supports broader research which highlights that false allegations can stem from complex motivations unrelated to assault, such as shame, social pressure, or retaliation, and these are especially harmful when aimed at prominent Black men already under heightened public scrutiny (Artz & Smythe, 2007; Du Toit, 2005). This is not to excuse any form of violence. Rather, this highlights how social and institutional bias bias can shape both the perception and impact of such allegations. Despite this, the accusations led to immense public backlash, political pressure, and his resignation from his ministerial post.

Another example is the 2022 case involving actor Mangaliso J. Ngema, who was accused of rape by his biological cousin, Queen Ngema (Birjalal, 2023). The allegation received significant media attention. Ngema denied the accusation and claimed that the complainant was experiencing mental-health difficulties, although there is no public record of an independent psychiatric evaluation to confirm this. In May 2023, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) withdrew the charges, stating that there was insufficient evidence and no reasonable prospect of a successful prosecution (TimesLIVE, 2023). The withdrawal of charges does not prove that the allegation was false, nor does it confirm that the alleged incident occurred. Instead, it reflects the well-documented difficulties in proving rape, which often relies on testimony and may lack physical or corroborative evidence.

Moreover, the Ngema case raises broader questions about how the justice system handles rape allegations in situations involving mental illness and close family relationships. If the complainant had a psychiatric condition, a formal assessment should have been conducted to determine whether she was mentally fit to make such a serious allegation, or whether her condition may have influenced her account. Without such an assessment, it is equally impossible to rule out the possibility that her vulnerability could have been exploited. The absence of a documented evaluation highlights gaps in how authorities approach cases involving complainants who may require specialised support. The case also shows how family dynamics, emotional bonds, and power relations can complicate both the reporting and the interpretation of rape allegations. These issues reinforce the need for thorough and holistic investigations, including appropriate mental-health assessments, to ensure fairness and justice for all parties involved (Birjalal, 2023; TimesLIVE, 2023).

A similar dynamic can be seen in the case of comedian Mongezi “Tol Ass Mo” Mahlangu, who was accused of rape by actress Lerato Moloi in 2020 (SowetanLIVE, 2020). This case also received extensive public attention and emotional debate. Tol Ass Mo maintained his innocence throughout the process. After a prolonged investigation, the NPA withdrew the charges due to insufficient evidence, concluding that the case could not proceed to trial. As in the Ngema matter, the lack of evidence does not confirm that the alleged incident did not occur, nor does it prove the allegation was fabricated. Rather, it demonstrates the legal and procedural challenges in establishing rape allegations to the evidentiary standard required for prosecution. Following the

withdrawal of charges, Tol Ass Mo described the significant emotional, financial, and reputational harm he experienced as a result of the accusation (SowetanLIVE, 2020).

These cases show that rape allegations, whether prosecuted, withdrawn, substantiated, or left unresolved, exist within a complex evidentiary environment. Rape is often difficult to prove because it typically occurs in private and may not leave physical evidence. At the same time, intentional fabrication is equally difficult to demonstrate without clear, affirmative proof. These examples highlight why caution is necessary when interpreting legally withdrawn or unprosecuted cases which is a lack of evidence is not proof that a rape did not happen, just as denial and case withdrawal are not proof that an allegation was fabricated. The Ngema and Tol Ass Mo cases therefore illustrate the broader challenges faced by the criminal justice system and society in assessing the truthfulness of rape allegations, and underscore the importance of careful, thorough, and sensitive investigative processes.

2.8 EFFECTS OF FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS ON BLACK MEN

The impact of false rape allegations on men is profound, with significant psychological and social repercussions. False rape accusations can lead to severe emotional distress, including feelings of shame, anger, and helplessness, which can have long-lasting effects on mental health and self-esteem (Kennedy et al., 2017). Following the rape allegations, Tol Ass Mo expressed his deep feelings about women, particularly Black women, during an interview with Thato Sikwane, popularly known as DJ Fresh, as he was on the brink of divorce. He stated, "Fresh... I am f**ken traumatized. I am traumatized by black women. I am traumatized to a point that I don't want to have a

black wife again." He further articulated his trauma, saying, "I even said that in my interview that when I was making love to my wife, I'd get flashbacks of this woman [Lerato Moloi's] face in my mind" (Ngcobo, 2023: online).

Additionally, societal perceptions surrounding false rape accusations often perpetuate stigma and prejudice against men. In the case of Tol Ass Mo, after his interview on the Showmax reality show *Unfollowed*, some people commented on his demeanour and choice of words, comparing him to R. Kelly. One comment read, "Being acquitted of a crime or having your charges dropped doesn't mean you're innocent or aren't a rapist," while another noted, "This interview ya Tol Pass Mo is giving R. Kelly with Gayle King" (Magagula, 2023, online). As mentioned earlier, men like Tol Ass Mo, who are victims of false rape allegations, must endure ongoing societal attacks. These false rape accusations severely damage Black men's reputations and social standing within their communities, as emphasized by Mkhize (2019), further exacerbating the challenges faced by those wrongfully accused and compounding the social consequences. However, society has the right to express its views about a situation, whether those views are based on truth or not. Therefore, silencing people would mean violating their right to freedom of expression. That said, it is evident that what follows false rape allegation is a burden of bearing the social consequences of an air of suspicion and hate that would be expected to haunt actual perpetrators. Perpetrator or not, once rape allegations are levelled against someone, society has a means of dispensing shame and stigma indiscriminately. This speaks to the ambivalences of how masculinities that historically placed men above the gender food chain have are the same bed upon which

the seeds of Black men victimhood are sown. What gives men power is the same mechanism upon which their demise is engineered and chiseled.

2.9 LEGAL PRECEDENTS AND CASE LAW ON FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Although false rape allegations are often discussed in the media, few studies explore how South African courts actually deal with them. Most attention focuses on public opinion or emotional effects, but less on how the justice system defines credibility, proof, and harm. Examining selected judgments helps to show how legal truth is produced and managed. The courtroom remains a key site where power, gender, and belief systems interact. Foucault (1977) argues that law disciplines speech and behaviour through procedures that claim to discover truth. Mignolo (2011) reminds us that these procedures are not culturally neutral; they stem from colonial traditions of reasoning. Thinkers such as Fanon (1963) and Mbembe (2001) show that this legacy continues to shape how Black men are represented as dangerous and how victims' voices are heard or dismissed. The following five cases illustrate how courts negotiate these tensions in practice.

In *G.C v J.C and Others* (2024 ZAWCHC 354), the Western Cape High Court awarded damages to a man who had been falsely accused of rape and detained. The judgment found that the accusation caused severe reputational and psychological harm. The court's reasoning reflects Foucault's (1977) view that legal institutions "produce truth" through systematic examination of statements and documents. Mignolo's (2011) concept of *border thinking* helps us see how this production of truth occurs within limits

set by Western legal logic, which often values written and procedural evidence over lived experience. The judgment also echoes Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma which entails that once accused, the plaintiff carried a social mark that persists even after acquittal. By recognising the damage of that stigma, the court showed that the law can function both as a source of control and as a space for repair.

In *S v Sekese* (2009 ZAECHMHC 10), the Eastern Cape High Court considered an appeal from a man convicted of rape who argued that the complainant fabricated the allegation after a personal dispute. The trial court had accepted her story without examining possible motives for false reporting. On appeal, the judges stressed that credibility must be assessed through consistency and evidence rather than emotion or sympathy. This case demonstrates how, as Foucault (1977) argues, truth is regulated through institutional practices that discipline both speech and emotion. The decision also supports Mignolo's (2011) claim that colonial legal forms still shape how credibility is judged, privileging certain voices as rational and others as doubtful. Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional lens reminds us that class and gender dynamics may influence who is considered believable. The appeal therefore reveals how justice depends not only on facts but also on underlying cultural expectations about gendered behaviour and reliability.

In *R v S* (2007 SCA 203/06), the court convicted the accused despite inconsistencies in the complainant's evidence, whereas the Supreme Court of Appeal overturned the conviction, stating that guilt must be based on credible, reliable facts rather than public pressure or assumptions about behaviour. This difference between the two courts

shows how legal truth is not fixed but constructed through judicial procedure. The Appeal Court's insistence on tested evidence reflects Foucault's (1977) idea of disciplinary power, where institutions regulate what counts as truth through formal rules. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity is also visible, as the trial court appeared to rely on moral expectations of how a "respectable" man should behave, while the Appeal Court rejected such assumptions and focused instead on evidentiary standards, showing how courts can reinforce or challenge gender norms. From Mignolo's (2011) perspective, the Appeal Court's reasoning reflects a colonial legacy of privileging rationality and procedural proof over emotion, positioning legal truth as something produced through controlled and authorised methods. Overall, the case shows how different courts interpret the same evidence differently, and how these interpretations reflect deeper social, gendered, and epistemic structures.

The case of *Cedric Shezi* (IOL News, 2013) is about of a man who spent ten years in prison after his daughter falsely accused him of rape. She later admitted that she had been pressured by her mother to lie. This tragedy exposes how power operates through family, law, and social belief. Foucault (1977) explains that once an accusation enters the legal system, it becomes part of an institutional process that constructs its own version of truth. Even when that truth later collapses, the person remains marked by stigma (Goffman, 1963). The Shezi case, particularly the daughter's lies from her mother and the court's former upholding of this 'evidence' as the truth, shows how the law can imprison not only individuals but also communities within repeating narratives of suspicion and control.

In the Mpumalanga Perjury Case, two young women admitted to making false rape reports against their boyfriends, with investigations showing that their actions were influenced by fear, lack of access to contraception, and other social pressures (News24, 2020; The Star, 2020). The court punished them for wasting state resources, which reflects Foucault's (1977) point that the legal system claims the power to decide what counts as "truth." Yet the truth that prevailed was the court's version, not necessarily a full picture of the social conditions that shaped the women's decisions. From Mignolo's (2011) view, the case shows how the law decides who is seen as credible, while Crenshaw's (1991) work reminds us that the women's structural challenges were ignored. Although the judgment protected the accused men and affirmed their innocence, it also reveals how the legal system can discipline both Black men and Black women by focusing on blame rather than on the deeper realities affecting their lives.

These selected few cases show that South African courts play a central role in deciding whose accounts of rape are believed and how legal truth is constructed. Although the cases do not fully explain why the accusations were made, they reveal that truth in rape allegations depends on legal procedure, evidentiary rules, and social expectations. Conceptually, Foucault's (1977) ideas of disciplinary power is evidence in the courts' ruling and decisions by deciding which voices are treated as credible, while at the same time Mignolo (2011) reminds us that these standards come from colonial legal traditions that still shape ideas of rationality and proof. Fanon (1963) and Mbembe (2001) show how racial and gender hierarchies influence who is trusted or doubted, and Connell (2005) and Goffman (1963) explain how masculinity and stigma affect public and legal judgments of accused men. These cases do not necessarily prove that deeper social

structures caused the accusations, but they do show that race, gender, and history shape how accusations are interpreted and how truth is produced in court. The next section explores how these power dynamics appear in male–female relationships.

2.10 GENDERED POWER AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Scholars have shown that false rape allegations are not just about the crime itself; they are also part of the power struggles that exist between men and women in both intimate and social relationships. In many studies, rape accusations are linked to wider conflicts between men and women, especially around control, revenge, and social reputation. Drawing on Foucault's (1978) idea that power is everywhere and operates through relationships, these allegations can be seen as tactics used within larger systems of power that work through social rules and ideas about gender and sexuality.

Internationally, Rumney and McCartan (2017) note that one common reason behind false rape allegations is relationship breakdown. During difficult break-ups, custody fights, or when one partner has been unfaithful, allegations may sometimes be used to hurt the other person's reputation or gain some advantage. Similarly, Lisak et al. (2010) found that false rape allegations can be connected to revenge, hiding consensual sexual activity, or protecting one's social image. Direk (2019) also explains that social expectations about sexuality and shame often shape these kinds of conflicts. Although not every false rape allegation happens for these reasons, many cases show that accusations often occur when relationships are emotionally charged or breaking down.

In South Africa, research on gender and masculinity helps explain why close relationships can become spaces of conflict. Studies on gender relations in South Africa show that unequal power between men and women plays a major role in GBV (Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna & Shai, 2010). Butchart (1998), using Foucault's ideas, shows how colonial systems created racial and gendered ways of controlling African bodies, systems that still influence society today. While his work focuses on women's vulnerability, these same power structures can also help explain false allegations against Black men. When trust breaks down in relationships, accusations may be used to get revenge or regain control, showing what Healicon (2014) calls "struggles over symbolic authority."

Connell's (1995) theory of 'hegemonic masculinity' also helps explain this. In South Africa, traditional ideas about men's authority are being challenged by social and economic changes, leading some men to experience what Morrell (2001) and Ratele (2013) describe as a "crisis of masculinity." This crisis can lead to tension, as men try to hold on to power while women assert more independence. Within this struggle, false rape allegations can become one of the ways through which power is fought over.

Fanon (1963) adds another layer to this understanding by linking these conflicts to the deeper history of colonial violence. He described the colonial world as divided between the coloniser and the colonised, where violence was used to control and to resist. This colonial violence shaped how Black men were seen as dangerous, aggressive, and hypersexual, and these stereotypes still influence how Black men are treated today. Fanon's idea that liberation requires breaking free from colonial systems can also be

seen metaphorically in how intimate relationships become spaces where historical injustices are repeated or resisted.

Biko (1978) also reminds us that racial oppression shapes identity and relationships, making power struggles within intimate life part of a larger story of resistance and dignity. From a decolonial perspective, Mignolo (2011), Quijano (2000), and Maldonado-Torres (2007) argue that colonial ways of thinking about power still shape how people understand gender, sexuality, and morality. In South Africa, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) shows that colonial and apartheid systems still influence how people relate to each other, including in intimate relationships and patterns of gender-based violence. These ideas help explain why issues of trust, control, and reputation are still deeply tied to South Africa's history of racial and colonial inequality.

Lemelle Jr. (2016) also contributes to these discussions by showing how race, gender, and power continue to influence experiences of violence and accusations in African diaspora communities. On another level, Brown and Smith (2016) and Johnson (2008) point out that false allegations sometimes arise because people are trying to protect themselves from social judgment. For example, young women may make false claims to avoid shame after consensual sex or to escape punishment from parents or communities. In such cases, the goal is not necessarily to harm the man but to protect personal honour, although the impact still falls heavily on the accused, especially in societies where Black men are already viewed with suspicion.

According to Gqola (2015), while it is important to acknowledge that false rape allegations do happen, this awareness must not be used to discredit women's real experiences of violence. Most rape reports are true, and women continue to suffer widespread sexual abuse. Still, as Maseko (2023) argues, we cannot ignore the serious harm that false allegations cause. Both truths must be recognised at once, to create a justice system that is fair, balanced, and humane.

However, how do both forms of truth function simultaneously in situations where either the accused or the accuser is labelled as mentally unstable? In cases involving mental illness, does the truth of the person deemed "sick" still matter? Should they bear the full consequences of their false allegations, and if so, how, and if not, why? The following section addresses these questions.

2.11 MENTAL HEALTH AND UNINTENTIONAL ALLEGATIONS

Not all false rape allegations are made with the clear intention to harm. Some happen in situations where the accuser is dealing with psychological distress, memory difficulties, or social pressure. Mental health factors such as trauma, stress, and anxiety can influence how people remember or interpret events, sometimes leading to mistaken or confused recollections of sexual encounters (Jones & Smith, 2017). In these cases, the allegation may not be a deliberate lie, but the result of misunderstanding, outside influence, or a sincere belief in something that did not actually happen.

Foucault's (1965) work *Madness and Civilization* provides an important lens for understanding how mental illness is constructed and controlled through systems of

power. He explains that society does not simply identify madness as a medical condition, but defines it through discourse, deciding who is rational, who is not, and whose voice counts as truth. In this sense, mental illness becomes both a medical and a moral category. When applied to cases of false or unintentional rape allegations, Foucault's ideas help explain how people labelled as 'mentally unstable' often lose credibility before the law and within society. Their words are treated with suspicion, and their intentions are interpreted through a framework of pathology rather than human complexity.

For Foucault, conceptual analysis of power helps us understand how power operates through social systems and ideas that shape how people see themselves and behave. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault explains how modern institutions control individuals through surveillance, normalisation, and discipline. This form of power pressures Black men to perform competing roles, being both emotionally restrained and hypermasculine, revealing how identity, emotion, and memory are shaped by broader systems of power and knowledge (Pitsoe, 2024; Critical Legal Thinking, 2019). Foucault's idea of the *Panopticon* shows how people internalise these controls, learning to monitor and discipline themselves even without direct supervision.

Foucault also traces the rise of medical knowledge and institutional authority in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), showing how the "clinical gaze" allows society to classify, observe, and control the human body and mind. This clinical gaze extends to the understanding of mental health and trauma where psychological distress and memory confusion, central in some unintentional false allegations, are framed within medical and

social definitions of what is “normal” or “pathological.” As a result, medical and psychiatric systems not only provide care, but also shape how people are recognised and judged by society.

Lemelle Jr. (2016) adds that Black men often face opposing social expectations: they are expected to show strength while also suppressing vulnerability. This creates deep psychological strain and affects how they remember and make sense of experiences. Zeynep Direk’s (2019) discussion of vulnerability and autonomy builds on this by showing that human autonomy is never absolute; it is shaped by relationships and power structures that influence one’s ability to act freely. This aligns with Foucault’s idea of *Governmentality* which explains how institutions and discourses subtly guide and limit people’s choices (Christensen, 2024).

Studies also show that trauma affects memory and perception (Lisak et al., 2010). When survivors give inconsistent accounts, it may reflect confusion or emotional distress rather than an intentional lie. Labeling such cases as false can therefore oversimplify complex psychological and social realities.

In South Africa, these issues are made worse by limited mental health services and the stigma surrounding psychological problems (Skeen et al., 2010; Petersen et al., 2012). Combining Lemelle’s and Direk’s insights with Foucault’s ideas on power and medical discourse shows how suppressed vulnerability weakens people’s ability to act with autonomy. Families and communities may respond to emotional crises in ways that unintentionally support false rape allegations as protective stories. This reflects

Foucault's view that institutions produce "docile bodies", individuals whose thoughts and behaviours are shaped by systems that define what is acceptable or deviant (Engstrand, 2020).

Well-known South African cases, such as those of Mangaliso J. Ngema and Tol Ass Mo, show how memory lapses, relationship breakdowns, and public pressure can destroy reputations even after acquittal (TimesLIVE, 2022; 2023). Similarly, the experience of Katlego Maboe highlights how men's limited emotional expression within rigid masculine hierarchies increases their vulnerability and public misunderstanding (News24, 2022; IOL, 2022).

Maseko (2023) points out that South Africa's justice system often struggles to distinguish deliberate falsehoods from confusion caused by stress or trauma. This neglects the complex connections between mental health and power. Foucault's idea of *Truth regimes* helps explain how legal and public narratives impose rigid "true or false" judgments that ignore the deeper interplay of trauma, memory, and social control (Discourseanalyzer.com, 2024). Acquitted men often face ongoing stigma, while distressed complainants face harsh judgment, exposing how fragile human autonomy can be and how dangerous unacknowledged vulnerability becomes.

2.12 MEDIA, PUBLIC DISCOURSE, AND MORAL PANIC

The media plays a powerful role in shaping how rape allegations are understood by the public. In South Africa, as Gqola (2015) argues, where legacies of race and gender already influence perceptions of guilt, the way media outlets report on cases can amplify

stigma and create what scholars call “moral panics.” This means that certain allegations are treated not only as individual cases but as evidence of broader social threats. When false rape allegations are involved, this dynamic is damaging, because media coverage often highlights the initial accusation with dramatic headlines, while much less attention is given when cases collapse, are withdrawn, or end in acquittal.

Scholars such as Temkin and Krahé (2008) and Kelly, Lovett, and Regan (2005) show that media across the world tends to sensationalise rape cases. In South Africa, this tendency interacts with racialised stereotypes of Black men as violent and hypersexual (Gqola, 2015; Hazan & Bridger, 2021). This means that accusations against Black men are more likely to attract public outrage and confirm long-standing prejudices. The result is that, even when allegations are proven false, reputational harm remains.

Several South African case studies illustrate this pattern clearly. In 2017, former politician Mduzuzi Manana was involved in a highly publicised case of assault (not rape) when he and two others attacked three women at a Johannesburg nightclub. Manana was convicted of assault and fined, but the case was framed in much of the media as part of the wider discourse on sexual violence and gender-based abuse. The coverage not only shaped public perceptions of Manana, but also fueled debates about accountability and the role of allegations in political life. What was largely absent, however, was a balanced perspective that acknowledged both the seriousness of violence against women and the rights of the accused to fair representation (Mail & Guardian, 2017). Another case is that of Katlego Maboe, a popular TV presenter whose career collapsed after allegations of abuse and misconduct. Although the allegations

were later proven false and Maboe was legally cleared, the media had already painted him a guilty person. His case demonstrates how difficult it is to undo reputational damage once the media has framed a story in a particular way (IOL, 2022). Even after his return to television, Maboe admitted that the stigma still followed him, showing how long-lasting the effects of false allegations can be.

Comedian Tol Ass Mo also faced rape allegations in 2020. Although the case was later withdrawn due to insufficient evidence, media reporting and extensive social media debate had already caused significant reputational harm (TimesLIVE, 2022). Online platforms amplified the story rapidly, with hashtags and public commentary shaping public judgment well before the courts reached a conclusion. This case highlights how, in the digital age, false allegations can spread quickly and widely, making it extremely difficult for the accused to restore their reputation even after being cleared.

Critically, scholars argue that the media's role is not neutral. Lüneburg (2022) explains how sensational reporting feeds into cycles of moral panic where accusations are presented as evidence of widespread social collapse or threat. When applied to false rape allegations, this means that individual men are turned into symbols of a problem much larger than themselves. For Black men, this dynamic is intensified by racialised assumptions that already mark them as dangerous.

At the same time, feminist scholars caution that media narratives can also harm women. When false allegations receive widespread attention, they can be used to discredit genuine survivors, feeding public doubt about rape claims more broadly (Gqola, 2015).

This creates a double harm: falsely accused men are stigmatised, and survivors of real rape face even greater barriers to being believed.

South African media plays a central role in how false rape allegations are constructed and remembered. By focusing heavily on initial accusations and downplaying withdrawals or acquittals by the courts, the media fuels reputational damage and moral panic. These effects are especially harmful for Black men, whose accusations are filtered through historical stereotypes of danger and hypersexuality. For this study, examining media coverage is crucial to understanding how false rape allegations extend beyond the courtroom and shape public opinion, community responses, and the lives of accused men long after cases are closed.

2.13 FEMINIST DISCOURSE AND THE SILENCING OF MALE VICTIMHOOD

As already mentioned above, the discussion of false rape allegations in South Africa cannot be separated from broader feminist debates about GBV. Feminist movements have been central in exposing the scale of sexual violence against women, pushing for stronger, and demanding justice for survivors. Without these efforts, rape would likely remain hidden and minimised as it was under colonialism and apartheid (Gqola, 2015). However, while feminism has been crucial for addressing women's vulnerability, some aspects of the discourse have been criticised for silencing or overlooking the possibility that men can also be victims, especially when it comes to false rape allegations.

Mama (1995) and Hassim (2006), writing from African feminist perspectives, argue that women's oppression cannot be understood without recognising the structural role of

gender inequality. Their work has been vital in drawing attention to systemic sexism and patriarchal violence. Yet, as Prügl (2018) notes, when feminist frameworks are applied too rigidly, they can reinforce a binary that positions women only as victims and men only as perpetrators. This binary leaves little space to acknowledge situations where men suffer gendered harm, such as when they are falsely accused of rape.

In South Africa, this silence is especially significant. Ratele (2013) and Khunou (2009) highlight that discussions of Black masculinity often focus on men's violence against women but pay less attention to the vulnerabilities that Black men themselves face. This imbalance means that when a Black man is falsely accused, his victimhood does not easily fit into the dominant gender narrative. Instead, accusations are often assumed to be true because they align with long-standing stereotypes of Black men as dangerous, hypersexual, and predatory (Hazan & Bridger, 2021).

Critically, Gqola (2015) adds that rape discourses in South Africa are shaped by both gender and race. While her work echoes the need to centre women's voices, it also indirectly shows how Black men's credibility has historically been undermined. This makes it difficult to talk about false rape allegations, particularly against Black men, without being accused of undermining women's struggles against violence. The result is a difficult silence: acknowledging male victimhood risks being read as "anti-feminist," yet ignoring it allows miscarriages of justice to persist. Similarly, Alcoff (2017: 21–36) calls for feminist theory to be rethought through a decolonial lens, challenging universal approaches that overlook or silence marginalised experiences, including those of Black men falsely accused of rape. Her work shows that transnational feminist movements

must recognise and include diverse identities shaped by colonial histories and intersecting systems of power.

Healicon's (2012) article adds depth to this discussion by exploring the complex relationship between recognition and narrative identity among survivors of sexual violence. Drawing on Judith Butler's idea that social norms determine "who is recognisable as human," Healicon shows how feminist frameworks can unintentionally exclude male victimhood by confining identity within narrow categories of "victim" or "perpetrator." She argues that for survivors to be seen as socially legitimate, to achieve what she calls *humanitas*, their stories must be told and acknowledged. While this process is often painful as social discourses tend to question survivors' credibility or hold them responsible for their suffering. For Black men, this struggle for recognition is even more difficult because their experiences are silenced by racial and gendered stereotypes that stem from the colonial matrix of power and the "coloniality of being."

Healicon also highlights the "double bind" that survivors face: they must speak their truth to seek validation and healing, yet doing so can expose them to stigma, disbelief, or retraumatisation. This paradox mirrors the experiences of men who are falsely accused of sexual violence and rape. Their attempts to defend themselves or tell their stories often meet public doubt and dismissal, trapping them in what Healicon (2016) calls a "difficult silence", which is a space where neither pain nor innocence finds full recognition. Within feminist and social justice discourses, this silence reveals how identity and recognition are ongoing, contested processes rather than fixed states.

Building on this, Healicon's (2016) book offers a critical examination of the cultural and political complexities surrounding sexual violence. In her chapter on this topic, she critiques dominant psychological and feminist approaches that frame survivors primarily as traumatised victims. Although such perspectives aim to protect survivors from blame, they can also strip them of agency by reducing their experiences to pathology and pain. Healicon shows that sexual violence operates within deeply gendered systems of power and compulsory heterosexuality, where women's sexuality is defined in relation to male authority. This critique is important for understanding how certain feminist narratives, while well-intentioned, can reinforce rigid binaries between victim and perpetrator. In doing so, they risk excluding or misrepresenting diverse experiences of survival and suffering, including those of men who are falsely accused of rape (Healicon, 2016).

Public debates in South Africa reveal these deep tensions surrounding false rape allegations. When high-profile cases such as those involving Mduzuzi Manana or comedian Tol Ass Mo emerge, women's rights activists often caution that emphasising false allegations may undermine the credibility of genuine survivors. Conversely, men's rights advocates sometimes use these cases to dismiss women's claims altogether. Both positions, however, oversimplify a complex issue. As Maseko (2023) observes, it is possible to hold two truths at the same time: rape remains widespread and deeply harmful to women, while false allegations also cause severe damage to men. A balanced response must therefore acknowledge both realities without allowing one to erase or delegitimise the other.

Lemelle Jr's (2010) analysis of Black masculinity within racialised sexual politics further situates this discussion within a broader historical and social framework. He argues that dominant cultural narratives have long constructed Black masculinity as both socially and sexually inferior, positioning Black men within contradictory pressures of hypermasculinity and social feminisation. These conflicting ideals produce deep psychological tension, shaping how Black men understand themselves and negotiate identity within oppressive social orders. The result is a form of internalised oppression where self-perception and social behaviour are constantly mediated by the gaze of racialised power.

From another perspective, the failure to acknowledge Black men's vulnerability to false rape allegations creates a justice blind spot. It reinforces the idea that justice is a "zero-sum game" between men and women, when in reality, fairness requires protecting the rights of all parties. This blind spot also undermines the legitimacy of the broader struggle against GBV. When innocent men are wrongly accused and their voices ignored, public trust in the justice system and in feminist advocacy can weaken.

Therefore, feminist scholarship has been vital in addressing women's vulnerability to sexual violence, but its neglect of male victimhood has left important gaps. In South Africa, this neglect is particularly harmful because it interacts with racial stereotypes that make Black men more likely to be assumed guilty. For this study, engaging with feminist discourse critically means acknowledging its contributions while also pointing out its silences. Only by doing so can we build a fuller understanding of how false rape allegations operate as part of gendered and racialised power dynamics. Together, these

scholars present a deep, intersectional, and decolonial framework that helps explain why male victimhood, especially among Black men who are falsely accused of rape, remains marginalised and silenced. Their arguments show how these experiences are shaped by the coloniality of being and the politics of recognition. To address this, feminist and social justice frameworks must move beyond restrictive binaries and adopt more inclusive approaches that recognise the complex identities, narratives, and power dynamics of all survivors.

2.14 LITERATURE GAPS

The above literature engagement has shown that false rape allegations are complex and deeply tied to questions of gender, race, history, and power. Internationally, scholars have highlighted the difficulty of measuring false allegations accurately, the harm they cause, and the ways justice systems and the media shape outcomes (Rumney, 2006; Lisak et al., 2010; Spohn & Tellis, 2014). In South Africa, researchers have provided detailed studies of rape reporting, attrition in the justice system, and the high levels of GBV (Artz, 2007; Smythe, 2015; Vetten, 2014; Machisa et al., 2023). However, despite this wide body of work, several important gaps remain.

First, there is very little research that focuses specifically on false rape allegations in South Africa. While case attrition and police investigations have been well studied, these works often concentrate on the challenges faced by genuine survivors. Much less attention is given to situations where allegations are false, particularly when the accused are Black men and from marginalised communities. This leaves a blind spot in the literature, as the voices of falsely accused men are rarely heard.

Second, the role of race in false rape allegations is not sufficiently explored. Scholars such as Gqola (2015) and Hazan & Bridger (2021) show how historical stereotypes continue to shape perceptions of Black men as violent and hypersexual. Yet, few studies connect these insights directly to the experiences of Black men accused of rape. This omission is striking given South Africa's Apartheid history and the persistence of racial inequalities in policing and the courts. Moreover, from a postcolonial perspective (Mbembe, 2001), the legacies of colonial violence and racial governance remain embedded in present-day practices of accusation and surveillance. False rape allegations can thus be understood not only as interpersonal conflicts but also as manifestations of broader postcolonial dynamics that reproduce violence against Black men under new guises.

Third, the gendered power dynamics underlying false rape allegations remain under-theorised. While feminist scholarship has rightly emphasised women's vulnerability to GBV (Mama, 1995; Hassim, 2006), far less attention has been paid to how women can also exercise power through allegations, positioning themselves as decisive actors over Black men's social and legal fates. Such dynamics intersect with systems of policing and governance where Black men are subjected to heightened surveillance and regulation, rendering them governable and, in Foucauldian terms, "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977). This perspective highlights how false rape allegations are not merely individual acts but are entangled in broader regimes of racialised and gendered power that discipline Black men disproportionately. Moreover, an Intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000) is largely absent from the South African context. The convergence of race, gender, and class intensifies Black men's vulnerability as they are

simultaneously criminalised through racial stereotypes of hypersexuality (Gqola, 2015) and disciplined through gendered narratives that cast men only as perpetrators. Without attending to these layered intersections of power, scholarship risks leaving unchallenged the structural conditions that allow false rape allegations to function as tools of control.

Fourth, while international scholars like Rumney and McCartan (2017) and Dambe (2024) examine motivations behind false allegations and the risks of criminalising them, South African research has not explored these dimensions in detail. Very little is known about the contexts in which false rape allegations are made locally, whether they arise from intimate partner conflict, revenge, social pressure, or confusion linked to trauma or mental health. Without this knowledge, responses remain inadequate and often biased.

Fifth, the literature reveals gaps in understanding the long-term consequences for men who are falsely accused. Maseko (2023) and Mujuzi (2023) highlight the absence of effective systems of redress in South Africa. Even when men are legally cleared, reputational harm, financial loss, and psychological distress often remain. Yet, beyond a few studies, these consequences are under-researched, leaving men without recognition or meaningful protection.

Sixth, the role of the media in amplifying false allegations has not been systematically examined. Individual cases such as those of Tol Ass Mo and Katlego Maboe show how accusations can dominate headlines and cause lasting reputational damage even after acquittal. Yet, there is limited scholarly analysis of how South African media practices

contribute to these outcomes. In the era of social media, where information spreads instantly and often without verification, addressing this gap becomes increasingly urgent. Finally, feminist scholarship in South Africa has been invaluable in exposing the scale of GBV, but it has paid little attention to male victimhood, especially in the context of false rape allegations. This silence risks reinforcing the binary of women as victims and men as perpetrators, leaving men who experience false allegations without space in the discourse. As Maseko (2023) argues, ignoring male victimhood undermines both justice for men and the credibility of GBV advocacy as a whole.

It can be argued that literature reveals that while much is known about rape, sexual violence, and gender power in South Africa, the specific issue of false rape allegations against Black men has been neglected. Few studies centre their voices, few examine the racialised nature of credibility, and few explore the lasting consequences of false accusations. This study addresses these gaps by focusing directly on the lived experiences of Black men in Gauteng who have been falsely accused of rape, situating their stories within South Africa's broader history of racial and gendered power, and offering insights into how justice and social recognition can be made more balanced.

To better understand this silence, it is important to move beyond description into theory. The next section of this chapter introduces the theoretical framework that guides the study. Drawing on Foucault's concepts of Power and Discourse, Connell's theory of Masculinities, and Crenshaw's Intersectionality, the framework explains how race, gender, and power intersect to shape both the making of false rape allegations and the ways they are interpreted in South Africa. This combination of theories provides the

tools to critically analyse how false rape allegations function not only as individual events but also as part of broader social and institutional systems.

2.15 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To understand false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa, the study used theoretical tools that reveal how these allegations operate within broader systems of power. No single theory can fully capture the psychological, racial, gendered, historical, and institutional dimensions of this phenomenon. For this reason, the study adopts a multi-theoretical approach, recognising that there is no “super theory” capable of explaining all aspects of the problem.

This section therefore approaches theory as a toolbox, where each framework functions as a tool designed for a specific task. Foucault’s work (1977; 1980) illuminates *Disciplinary power* and the production of “truth”; Connell’s theory of *Hegemonic Masculinity* (1995) explains how masculinities are organised and racialised; and Crenshaw’s *Intersectionality* (1989; 1991) shows how race, gender, and class interlock to shape vulnerability and credibility. African-centred scholars such as Ratele (2008; 2017) foreground the lived experiences of Black men, while Fanon (1963), Quijano (2000), Mbembe (2001; 2003), Mignolo (2007; 2011), and Anzaldúa (1987) deepen the analysis by highlighting coloniality, racial surveillance, border thinking, and the liminal spaces occupied by falsely accused Black men in South Africa.

Together, these frameworks operate like pieces in a mosaic: each contributes a part of the picture, and only when combined do they reveal a fuller understanding of how

power, race, gender, memory, and truth-making shape false rape allegations. This mosaic-and-toolbox approach allows the study to draw on multiple strengths without expecting any single theory to do conceptual work it cannot sustain.

Adopting this plural and integrated approach is also a decolonial choice. Scholars such as Ake (1979), Rabaka (2010), and Mignolo (2011) argue that African realities require theoretical perspectives grounded in African histories and lived experiences. Following this position, the study brings Western and African-centred theories into conversation rather than hierarchy, using each where it is most analytically meaningful. This approach aligns with Mignolo's (2011) idea of "pluriversality", which rejects universal explanations in favour of frameworks that allow "many worlds to fit."

This integrated theoretical foundation guides the study's research questions, data collection, and analysis by linking participants' lived experiences with broader structures of discourse, power, and inequality. The following section therefore introduces the first major component of the framework: Foucauldian concepts of Power, Discourse, Biopolitics, and Governmentality, and explains how they relate to false rape allegations in South Africa.

2.16 POWER, DISCOURSE, BIOPOLITICS AND GOVERNMENTALITY

Foucault's work provides an essential foundation for analysing how power operates within society. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977, p. 27) explains that "power should be seen as a network of relations, always in tension, rather than a possession that some hold and others lack." This idea challenges traditional views that see power

only as domination from above. Instead, power circulates through institutions, practices, and discourses, shaping what people consider normal or deviant.

In the context of false rape allegations, Foucault's (1977) conception of power provides a critical lens for understanding how certain men, particularly Black men, are discursively constructed as threats within dominant legal and social imaginaries. Foucault's notion of *Discourse* refers to the systems of knowledge and language that define what counts as truth, legitimacy, and morality. As he asserts, "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors'... In fact, power produces reality" (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). This statement shows that power does not merely silence or punish; it actively *creates* the categories through which individuals are perceived, classified, and judged.

In South Africa, colonial and Apartheid regimes produced racialised "truths" about Black masculinity, representing Black men as hypersexual, violent, and morally suspect (Fanon, 1963; Biko, 1978). These representations were embedded within the state's juridical, educational, and media apparatuses, which functioned as mechanisms of disciplinary surveillance and control. Under Apartheid, sociopolitical power *excluded* Black men from full social and legal citizenship, *repressed* their humanity through criminalisation and social stigma, and *censored* their capacity to define their own moral subjectivity. Such mechanisms of exclusion and repression did not simply vanish with democracy; they evolved within new institutional and discursive forms.

Within present day South Africa, these inherited discourses continue to operate through modern structures of justice, media reporting, and gender politics. When a Black man is accused of rape, whether truthfully or falsely, the historical residue of these discourses shapes how guilt and innocence are immediately perceived. The accusation itself activates a pre-existing field of meaning in which the Black male body is already read as dangerous and culpable. This is where Foucault's (1977) insight into the "power of power" becomes most salient: power produces subjects not only by naming and disciplining them, but also by determining whose voices are heard and whose experiences are silenced. In false rape allegation cases, Black men often find their narratives *excluded* from public sympathy, *repressed* through social and institutional suspicion, and *censored* within the broader discourse of gender-based violence, which tends to privilege one form of victimhood over another.

Foucault's concept of *Biopower* is equally important in this. In *The History of Sexuality*, he defines biopower as "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1978, p. 140). This describes how states and institutions regulate populations through laws, surveillance, and social norms. During Apartheid, biopolitical control was exercised through racial classification, pass laws, and policing that treated Black men as subjects to be monitored and contained. Such control persists through present-day criminal justice and media systems that continue to mark Black men as suspicious or dangerous.

The concept of *Governmentality* further explains how individuals internalise power. Foucault (1991, p. 87) defines *Governmentality* as "the conduct of conduct," meaning

the ways in which people learn to manage themselves according to dominant norms. In this study, this notion helps to show how many men, aware of the risks of false rape allegation, begin to discipline their own actions and emotions to avoid suspicion. The power of accusation thus becomes self-regulating: men modify their behaviour in fear of being misread or wrongly accused.

However, Foucault's work has been criticised for neglecting colonial and racial contexts (Mbembe, 2003). To make his framework more relevant to South Africa, it can be extended through Postcolonial and Decolonial thinkers. Aníbal Quijano (2000, p. 542) describes the *colonial matrix of power* as the system that "articulates race, labour, gender, and knowledge into a global hierarchy," showing how colonialism produced long-lasting structures that still define who holds credibility and who is distrusted. Mbembe (2003, p. 17) develops the concept of *Necropolitics*, which is the "power to dictate who may live and who must die", to describe how colonial regimes exercised control over life and death. This framework exposes how the social death of being labelled a "rapist" can function as a modern form of racial punishment.

Similarly, Fanon (1963) reveals how colonial power dehumanised the Black subject. He writes that "the colonised man is an envious man" who is forced to "see his own image in the eyes of the coloniser" (Fanon, 1963, p. 30). Such internalised control mirrors Foucault's concept of *Governmentality*, but within a racialised context which the concept originally does not speak deep of. The fear of false accusation thus reflects both external surveillance and internalised colonial trauma.

To add another layer to the discussion above, I now turn to Connell's concept of *Hegemonic masculinity* which addresses the role of race in the construction of truth and helps explain why false rape allegations disproportionately affect Black men in South Africa.

2.17 HEGEMONIC AND MARGINALISED MASCULINITIES

Connell's theory of masculinities offers an important framework for understanding how different forms of masculinity are produced, valued, and controlled within society. In *Masculinities*, Connell (1995, p. 77) defines *Hegemonic masculinity* as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy.” In other words, *Hegemonic masculinity* is the dominant ideal of manhood that justifies male power and maintains gender hierarchy. It is not necessarily the most common form of masculinity, but the most socially honoured one, often associated with strength, control, heterosexuality, and authority.

Connell (1995, p. 80) also explains that “other masculinities are subordinated or marginalised” in relation to this ideal. Marginalised masculinities occur when forms of manhood are devalued because of race, class, sexuality, or other social factors. For example, under Apartheid and in the post-Apartheid era, Black men have been positioned as “failed” or “dangerous” versions of masculinity when measured against White, middle-class norms. Such marginalisation is not only cultural but also institutional, shaped by unequal access to power, representation, and justice.

In the context of false rape allegations, this theoretical lens reveals how hegemonic norms of masculinity intersect with racial hierarchies. The dominant social image of a “respectable” man often mirrors White, middle-class standards, while Black men are more easily cast as hyper-sexual or aggressive. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 846) later clarified that hegemonic masculinity “does not correspond to a fixed type of man but is the pattern of practice that allows men’s dominance over women to continue.” This dynamic extends to relations among men themselves, where racialised stereotypes exclude Black men from full participation in the category of the “respectable man.”

The concept of *Complicit masculinity* (Connell, 1995) further helps to explain how men who do not embody hegemonic ideals may still benefit from them. In South Africa, some men, particularly within state or media institutions, reinforce the association between Black male sexuality and violence to maintain moral distance from those stigmatised. This process sustains a racialised moral order where allegations against Black men resonate more strongly with public fears and established myths of danger.

Connell’s framework also connects with Foucault’s view of power as relational. Masculinities are not fixed identities but ongoing social negotiations influenced by institutional discourses. As Connell (1995, p. 71) writes, “Masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience.” This relational understanding aligns with this study’s focus on how Black men’s bodies become sites of both suspicion and discipline in gendered power relations.

However, this analysis remains incomplete without considering *Intersectionality*. Looking through the lens of intersectionality allows for a deeper understanding of false rape allegations in South Africa, how they affect men differently, who is most impacted, and why. Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality complements the ideas of Foucault and Connell by showing how race, class, and gender interact to shape experiences of accusation and credibility.

2.18 INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER, RACE AND CLASS

Crenshaw's theory of *Intersectionality* provides a vital analytical tool for understanding how systems of power such as race, gender, and class intersect to shape people's experiences of oppression and privilege. In her foundational essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, Crenshaw (1989, p. 140) explains that "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated." Although her focus was on Black women, Crenshaw's insight applies more broadly to how intersecting identities shape all individuals' social positioning and therefore experiences.

In this study, *Intersectionality* is extended to explore how Black men experience gendered and racialised forms of vulnerability within accusations of sexual violence. While men are generally privileged within patriarchal systems, Black men occupy a contradictory position: they are both gendered as male and racialised as inferior or dangerous. This duality exposes how racism and sexism can converge to create a unique form of marginalisation. As Crenshaw (1991, p. 1244) later argued, "the problem

with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, but rather the opposite...that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences.” This means that analyses focusing only on gender, for example “men vs. women”, overlook how race and class mediate those experiences.

Applied to false rape allegations in South Africa, intersectionality helps to reveal how the criminalisation of Black men cannot be separated from historical and structural forces. During colonialism and Apartheid, legal and social systems framed Black male sexuality as a threat to White womanhood and social purity. These stereotypes persist subtly within post-apartheid society, where Black men continue to face disproportionate suspicion in cases of sexual misconduct. *Intersectionality* thus provides the theoretical lens to examine how these overlapping systems of power, that is, patriarchy, racism, and class inequality, produce the conditions in which false rape allegations gain traction and credibility.

Crenshaw’s framework also aligns with Foucault’s and Connell’s theories by showing how discourse and hierarchy intersect in the lived experiences of racialised men. Where Foucault (1977) observes how power disciplines bodies, and Connell (1995) describes how hegemonic masculinity privileges certain male identities, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) reveals how these structures work simultaneously across categories. Intersectionality exposes the complex layering of domination that cannot be reduced to a single axis of analysis.

Furthermore, *Intersectionality* contributes to a critical decolonial dimension. By foregrounding social location and historical context, it resonates with African epistemologies that view identity and power as relational and socially situated (Ake, 1979; Rabaka, 2010). Within the South African setting, it helps to interpret the lived realities of falsely accused Black men, not merely as individual injustices, but as outcomes of intersecting oppressions that persist from colonial and apartheid legacies. This theoretical approach therefore broadens the understanding of gendered violence by showing how both men and women can be differently situated within overlapping matrices of power.

The concepts discussed above, drawn from Foucault, Connell, and Crenshaw, represent Eurocentric approaches to understanding power and gender. The following section introduces Decolonial and Postcolonial epistemologies to explore how African problems may require African-centred theoretical solutions.

2.19 DECOLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

Decolonial and postcolonial epistemologies provide the lens through which this study reinterprets and extends Western critical theories. These perspectives address the limitations of Eurocentric frameworks by situating power and knowledge within the histories of colonialism and racial domination. Fanon (1963) demonstrates how colonial violence dehumanised the Black subject and produced internalised inferiority. His analysis of colonial psychology reveals how domination operates not only through physical coercion, but also through the shaping of consciousness. Aníbal Quijano (2000) builds on this by formulating the *colonial matrix of power*, a global system that

links race, labour, and knowledge production in ways that continue to privilege Western epistemologies and marginalise African ways of knowing. Mbembe (2003) furthers this critique through his concept of *Necropolitics*, which is the power to decide who may live with dignity and who must exist under conditions of social or physical death.

Together, these thinkers show that colonialism did not simply oppress bodies, but also structured entire systems of knowledge, representation, and value. Integrating their work strengthens this study's theoretical framework by situating Foucault's insights within South Africa's specific history of racial governance. The combined perspectives of Fanon, Quijano, and Mbembe thus illuminate how colonial and Apartheid legacies continue to regulate Black men's lives, defining whose voices are believed, whose identities are pathologised, and whose innocence is doubted. By embedding these Decolonial theories within the broader analytical framework, this study challenges Eurocentric boundaries of knowledge and advances a critical, African-centred understanding of gendered power relations.

2.20 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the existing literature and theoretical perspectives surrounding false rape allegations, with particular attention to their racialised and gendered dimensions in South Africa. It demonstrated that these allegations cannot be understood in isolation but must be seen as products of intersecting systems of colonial history, patriarchal power, and institutional bias. International and local studies revealed how stereotypes of Black masculinity, constructed under colonialism and Apartheid, continue to shape perceptions of guilt and innocence. The review also showed that legal

systems, media narratives, and feminist discourses have often struggled to balance protection for genuine survivors with justice for falsely accused men. It identified key gaps in the literature, notably the lack of research centering the voices of Black men who have been falsely accused and the enduring silence surrounding male victimhood in gender-based violence discourse.

Through Foucault's analysis of *Power and Discourse*, Connell's theory of *Hegemonic and Marginalised masculinities*, and Crenshaw's *Intersectionality*, the chapter built a framework for understanding how race, gender, and class converge to produce unequal experiences of justice. Overall, the chapter established that false rape allegations function as a continuation of colonial and patriarchal control, regulating bodies, reputations, and social belonging. Having laid this conceptual and theoretical foundation, the next chapter turns to the methodology, explaining how the study was designed to explore these lived experiences empirically and to give voice to those silenced within South Africa's gendered landscape of justice.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“If you cannot see a problem, you cannot solve it. And if you cannot name a problem, you cannot understand it.” Crenshaw, Mapping the Margins (1991)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The methodological foundation of this study is grounded in a deliberate rejection of zero-point epistemology, which Grosfoguel (2007: 214) describes as the belief that researchers can occupy a neutral and detached position outside the power relations of society. Instead, this study adopts a decolonial approach that recognizes that all knowledge is shaped by history, power, and social location. Following Mignolo (2009: 160), the study engages in epistemic disobedience by moving away from Eurocentric standards of objectivity that have historically marginalized the racialized experiences of Black men. By focusing on the often-silenced issue of false rape allegations against Black men, the researcher acknowledges that their positionality as a Black scholar offers an important epistemic perspective. This is not a rejection of academic rigour, but a conscious methodological choice aimed at challenging the colonality of knowledge that continues to shape gender discourses in South Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 52).

Therefore, this chapter outlines the methodological foundations of the study. It begins by discussing the research design and then explains the selection of Gauteng province as the study site. The chapter further discusses the selection of participants and the research tools used to collect data. It also explains the practical process of data collection while critically reflecting on the limitations of the methods employed. The final

section addresses the ethical considerations of the study, including confidentiality, anonymity, and the protection of participants. In addition, the chapter reflects on the importance of positionality and reflexivity, particularly because the researcher is a Black man and therefore personally connected to the subject under investigation. Rather than compromising the study, this positionality provides critical insight into the racialized and gendered dynamics explored in the research.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a mixed-methods design because it supports a decolonial approach by valuing more than one way of knowing. Decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo (2011) and Grosfoguel (2013) argue that Eurocentric research often treats quantitative, “objective” knowledge as superior to lived experience. A mixed-methods design challenges this hierarchy by placing numerical data and personal narratives on equal footing. The quantitative component identifies broad patterns, while the qualitative component brings forward Black men’s lived experiences, emotions, and interpretations which are forms of knowledge that are often marginalised. Using both methods together reflects a decolonial commitment to epistemic plurality, showing that no single method can fully capture the racial, gendered, and political complexities of false rape allegations in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Philosophically, this study is grounded in critical realism, which links post-positivist and interpretivist traditions. Post-positivism holds that a real world exists and can be studied through systematically, often quantitative methods (Bhaskar, 1978), while interpretivism emphasises how people create meanings and understand their experiences through

qualitative insight (Schutz, 1967). Critical realism bridges these views by arguing that social phenomena have both observable patterns and underlying meanings that operate at different levels of reality (Bhaskar, 1998). This shows quantitative methods help identify material trends related to race, gender, and class, while qualitative methods explore how individuals interpret and make sense of these experiences. In this way, mixed methods support the study's aim of examining false rape allegations as both structural and experiential phenomena.

Foucault's (1977) concepts helps to interpret the qualitative material. His work on power, knowledge, biopower, and surveillance explains how discourses around rape and guilt can regulate Black male bodies and shape who is seen as credible. These insights guide the qualitative analysis, particularly through Foucauldian discourse analysis, which examines how language reflects power relations. The quantitative strand uses structured survey questions to capture demographic patterns, aligning with the study's intersectional framework. Together, the two strands provide a balanced analysis: quantitative data reveals broad trends, while qualitative data shows how those trends are lived, felt, and interpreted within racialised and gendered power structures.

To capture the complex and often overlooked experiences of the participants, this study uses a qualitative approach based on Anzaldúa (1987: 77) concept of the borderlands. In this framework, the falsely accused Black man is understood as existing in a social and psychological borderland, where colonial legal systems and racialized ideas about gender come into conflict. This approach allows the study to go beyond basic data collection and instead focus on the in-between and uncertain position of individuals who

have historically been denied full recognition as human beings (Wynter 2003: 260). Because of this, the study uses critical and analytical language to accurately describe these experiences. Such experiences of constant suspicion and social judgment cannot be fully captured using neutral or simplified language commonly found in positivist research. To strengthen the study's credibility, methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978) is used. This means that findings from different methods are compared and connected, not just to confirm results, but to question and disrupt dominant narratives that often silence marginalised voices. This process also aligns with the Decolonial commitment outlined by Mignolo (2011), Grosfoguel (2013), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), who all emphasise the importance of knowledge justice and the inclusion of subaltern perspectives.

However, it is important to note that combining quantitative and qualitative data required careful attention to ensure that numerical patterns and narrative insights complemented each other. As Creswell and Clark (2018) note, integrating diverse forms of data demands methodological balance and analytical skill. This study addressed these challenges through structured procedures, including descriptive and inferential statistical analysis for quantitative data and Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic framework for qualitative data, supported by triangulation to enhance credibility and minimise bias.

3.3 RESEARCH PHYSICAL SETTING AND CONTEXT

The study was conducted in South Africa, with a particular focus on the province of Gauteng. South Africa provides a critical setting for this research because of its deeply

entrenched history of racialised and gendered power relations. The legacies of colonialism and Apartheid continue to shape present-day South Africa's social dynamics, including how allegations of sexual violence are perceived and acted upon (Fanon, 1963; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Within this context, Black men often occupy a position of heightened vulnerability where longstanding stereotypes of criminality and hyper-sexuality intersect with current struggles around gender equality and justice. The choice of the broader research setting, that is, South Africa, was further shaped by institutional and societal silences surrounding false rape allegations. Although South Africa has strong legal frameworks, public health campaigns, and advocacy programmes addressing GBV, relatively few structures recognise or support men who have been falsely accused. This absence of institutional recognition further marginalises their experiences and reinforces perceptions that their voices lack legitimacy (Gqola, 2015; Howe, 2008). Conducting the study in this environment was therefore critical to challenging such silences and documenting the perspectives of a group often excluded from dominant gender narratives.

The choice of Gauteng is particularly significant because it is South Africa's most populous and economically active province, encompassing major cities such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Ekurhuleni. As the country's main economic hub, Gauteng is marked by striking racial, cultural, and socio-economic diversity, reflecting the broader inequalities and contradictions of post-Apartheid South Africa. This diversity provided access to a wide range of Black men's experiences, from urban to peri-urban and township contexts, thereby enriching the study's data. Moreover, Gauteng has been a key site of public debate and activism around GBV, yet the experiences of men falsely

accused of rape remain underexplored. By focusing on this province, the study engages an overlooked aspect of GBV discourse and invites a more inclusive conversation about gender and justice in South Africa. However, this internal variation required careful reflection when interpreting and generalising the findings. Different living conditions across Gauteng's social and spatial environments shape how people experience issues of race, gender, and justice. Recognising this, the study situates participants' experiences within these varied contexts rather than treating Gauteng as a uniform whole.

That said, Gauteng provides a rich and relevant context for investigating false rape allegations because it embodies the contradictions of post-Apartheid South Africa; economic progress alongside deep inequality, legal reform alongside social bias, and democratic ideals alongside structural violence. The setting thus allows for a critical exploration of how colonial and patriarchal legacies continue to shape contemporary meanings of truth, justice, and gendered credibility. By grounding the study in this provincial and national context, the research not only intended to reflect the lived realities of South Africa's most dynamic province, but also strengthens the methodological justification for its Decolonial, Intersectional, and critical approach.

However, acknowledging the geographical and demographic scope of this research is an important part of maintaining methodological rigour within a decolonial framework. Following Grosfoguel (2007: 213), this study rejects the idea that knowledge can be presented as universal or completely objective from a single point of view. For this reason, the conclusions regarding the impact of false rape allegations on Black men are

presented as situated knowledge shaped by the specific historical, social, and political conditions of Gauteng.

This approach helps to avoid making broad national generalizations by recognising that, although the identified power relations reflect wider patterns within the colonial matrix of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 11), they are experienced differently depending on context. By clearly defining the scope of the findings, the dissertation remains analytically critical while also meeting the academic requirement of grounded and context-sensitive methodological justification.

Because of this complexity, the transferability of findings to other contexts needs methodological caution. Future research should consider stratified or complementary qualitative approaches that capture these internal variations in more depth. Paying attention to these local differences is vital for developing a richer and more context-sensitive understanding of the phenomenon under study. This methodological sensitivity also supports the study's Decolonial and Border-thinking orientation which emphasises knowledge production rooted in real, lived contexts rather than abstract generalisations. Border thinking refers to generating knowledge from the perspectives of those positioned at the margins of dominant power structures, allowing alternative, decolonial ways of understanding the world to emerge (Mignolo, 2000). By doing so, the study resists homogenising tendencies in research and upholds the value of pluriversality, that is, the idea that multiple realities and perspectives coexist within the same social space.

3.4 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The main target group for this study was Black men living in Gauteng, South Africa. However, participation was not restricted by gender, sex, race, or creed. Because the survey was shared online, any South African willing to participate could take part, including women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community. This broader participation helped capture general public views on false rape allegations against Black men, rather than limiting the study only to the perspectives of the target group.

Including diverse participants was also important for understanding how gendered power relations shape perceptions of false rape allegations. Black men in South Africa have historically faced overlapping forms of discrimination based on race, gender, and class, which may increase their vulnerability to suspicion or wrongful accusation (Crenshaw, 1991; Gqola, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

For this study, “Black men” were defined as people of African origin who identify as male. This definition included individuals from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds, whether or not they had personally experienced a false rape allegation. Including both those with direct experience and those with general opinions provided a broader understanding of community narratives. This follows Bryman’s (2016) view that population definitions should be both clear and inclusive to produce meaningful findings.

3.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability method where participants are selected because they have characteristics relevant to the research question (Patton,

2015; Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). In this case, the key characteristic was being a Black man living in Gauteng who could offer insight into false rape allegations. Purposive sampling was suitable because the study aimed for deep understanding within a socially marginalised group, rather than generalisation to the entire South African population (Creswell, 2014; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). It is commonly used in research on sensitive or under-explored issues where targeted recruitment is necessary (Marshall, 1996; Palinkas et al., 2015).

However, purposive sampling has limitations. Since participants are not selected randomly, the sample may not fully represent the wider population (Etikan et al., 2016). For example, using online surveys may exclude people with limited internet access, such as those in rural or low-income areas (Singer and Ye, 2013). Despite these limitations, purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because it allowed access to relevant participants and produced rich, meaningful data.

3.6 RESEARCH TOOLS

The study made use of online surveys. In total, 300 survey responses were received, of which 298 participants provided informed consent, forming the final sample for analysis. This number aligns with methodological recommendations that suggest 200–400 participants are adequate to ensure reliable quantitative results and rich qualitative insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020). The strong response rate for such a sensitive topic highlights both the importance of the issue and the willingness of the participants to share their experiences when confidentiality and anonymity are assured.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were collected through an online survey designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information from Gauteng Province residents. As discussed above, the choice of an online survey was both ethical and practical as it allowed participants to discuss a highly sensitive issue while maintaining anonymity and control over what they chose to share. This approach reduced the risk of social desirability bias which is a scenario where participants give answers, they think are more acceptable rather than what they truly believe, and encouraged more honest responses (Joinson, 2001; Evans & Mathur, 2018). It was also suitable for a topic surrounded by stigma, confirming its ethical and methodological appropriateness. For example, one recurring qualitative theme identified in the analysis was “social death” where participants described feeling publicly condemned and isolated after being falsely accused, which illustrated how stigma operates beyond the legal process.

The survey was created and distributed using Microsoft Forms, chosen for its accessibility and ease of use across devices. Participants could complete it at their own convenience, which helped increase response rates (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014). Data collection took place between 19 August and 18 September 2025. To reach a diverse range of respondents, the survey was shared through the UNISA myLife email system and on social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok. Although formal collaboration with advocacy organisations like False Accusations Support SA and the Innocence Project South Africa was not achieved, the outreach process reflected a deliberate effort to connect with networks engaged in gender justice and wrongful conviction advocacy.

The survey consisted of six sections, beginning with demographic questions (age, education, marital status, employment) and moving to issues such as race, gender roles, the legacy of Apartheid, and social class. These questions examined how these factors influence perceptions of accused Black men. Later sections asked participants about personal or indirect experiences of false accusations, psychological and social effects, and perceived causes and prevention strategies. The final open-ended section invited participants to reflect freely, providing a space for personal narratives and deeper meaning. This combination of closed and open-ended questions reflects a mixed-methods design which provides both statistical breadth and interpretive depth (Creswell, 2014).

The instrument was pilot-tested with a small group of participants to ensure that it was clear, culturally relevant, and aligned with the study's aims. Feedback from the pilot phase led to revisions that improved the reliability and validity of the tool (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). To strengthen the analysis, secondary data were also drawn from national sources such as the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Department of Correctional Services, and advocacy groups like Sonke Gender Justice. This helped situate the primary findings within a wider social and political context (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2015).

However, while this tool achieved the objectives of the study, it is crucial to state the shortfalls of using this tool. The use of an online survey created the possibility of sampling bias, as participation depended on access to digital devices and stable internet connections. This inevitably excluded some groups, particularly men in

economically disadvantaged areas who may not have had reliable digital access. Such exclusion reflects broader structural inequalities in South Africa and limits the representation of the most marginalised communities (Singer & Ye, 2013). To reduce this bias, the survey was distributed across multiple platforms and informal networks, though formal partnerships with civil society organisations could not be finalized.

More so, the sensitive nature of the topic may have led to self-selection bias as those with direct experiences or strong opinions about false rape allegations may have been more willing to participate. This could have underrepresented perspectives from individuals less affected or less vocal about the issue. The inclusion of both closed and open-ended questions, however, helped to broaden the range of responses and reduce this bias. It also goes without saying that the online and anonymous format, while promoting honesty and safety, limited opportunities for follow-up or clarification. Some responses may have lacked contextual depth, though pilot testing helped refine clarity and cultural relevance (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014).

3.8 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

The trustworthiness of this study is based on decolonial reflexivity rather than a claim of complete neutrality. Following Lincoln and Guba, credibility and dependability were strengthened through an audit trail and member checking. However, these methods are also supported by what Saidiya Hartman describes as “wake work,” a careful and ethical practice of engaging with the traumatic histories of anti-Blackness while remaining critically aware of their impact (Sharpe 2016: 104). In addition, the confirmability of the findings is ensured through ongoing reflexivity regarding the researcher’s positionality within the South African racial

context and what Mills (1997: 11) conceptualises as the racial contract. By explicitly acknowledging epistemic disobedience, the study is transparent about its analytical stance as a deliberate challenge to the forms of knowledge production that contribute to the erasure of Black male experiences in South African gender studies.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS and Excel, using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns between variables such as age, education, and perceptions of false rape allegations (Bryman, 2016; Pallant, 2020). Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework.

In this study, the researcher read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data, then coded meaningful statements manually. These codes were grouped into themes, which were then reviewed, refined, and clearly defined. The final themes were written up to show how they related to the research questions. Reflexive journaling helped minimise bias and ensured interpretations remained grounded in participants' perspectives (Burns, 2006).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was achieved through methodological triangulation, where statistical patterns were compared and enriched by narrative explanations. For example, numerical findings showing that many participants viewed false allegations as a form of gendered power were supported by qualitative accounts that described how these power relations were experienced in everyday life (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Trustworthiness was ensured through several strategies. Quantitative reliability was supported by careful survey design and pilot testing. Qualitative credibility was strengthened by providing detailed descriptions and using participants' own words in reporting. Dependability was maintained through a documented audit trail of analytic decisions, and confirmability was achieved through continuous reflexive journaling. While member checking was not possible due to the anonymity requirement, transferability was enhanced by clearly describing the research setting and participants' contexts as argued by Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, (2011).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical integrity was central to this study because it deals with a highly sensitive and emotionally charged topic, false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa. Before any data were collected, ethical clearance (Ethical Clearance number: Rec-240816-052) was obtained from the University of South Africa (UNISA) Research Ethics Committee, confirming that the research design, tools, and procedures met the institution's ethical standards for protecting participants' rights, dignity, and well-being (UNISA, Policy on Research Ethics, 2016).

3.10.1 Informed consent

Because of the personal and emotional nature of the topic, participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained electronically before participants began the survey. The consent form clearly explained the purpose of the study, the methods used, possible risks and benefits, and the participants' right to withdraw at any

stage without any negative consequences. This process followed the ethical principle of respect for autonomy, as outlined by Babbie and Mouton (2001).

3.10.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity were treated as separate but equally important ethical principles in this study. Confidentiality refers to the researcher's duty to protect the information participants provide and ensure it is not shared with anyone who is not authorised to see it (Wiles et al., 2008). To uphold confidentiality, all data were stored on password-protected systems accessible only to the researcher and supervisors.

Anonymity means that participants cannot be identified from the information they give, either by the researcher or by anyone reading the final report (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). To ensure anonymity, no identifying details such as names, addresses, or IP information were collected, and all responses were anonymised immediately after submission. Only summarised data and anonymised quotes were used in reporting.

These measures complied with South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA, 2013) and aligned with international GDPR (2018) standards for secure and responsible data handling.

3.10.3 Protection of the participants from psychological harm

Given the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher designed the survey questions using neutral, non-triggering language to minimise emotional distress; for example, instead of

directly asking whether a participant had been falsely accused, the survey invited them to share “any experiences or views” they were comfortable disclosing. Although such wording reduces discomfort, it cannot fully prevent distress for individuals with traumatic experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

To protect participants, contact details for verified, free counselling services accessible throughout Gauteng were provided, including LifeLine South Africa (24-hour line: 0861 322 322), the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre (0800 428 428; 1207867), and the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (0800 567 567). These organisations offer nationwide telephonic support at no cost. Participants also received the researcher’s email address and the UNISA Ethics Office contact details for concerns or follow-up. In cases where a participant might disclose ongoing criminal activity or intent to harm another person, the researcher would follow UNISA’s ethical guidelines by halting data collection, explaining the limits of confidentiality, and referring the matter to the appropriate authorities or crisis services. These combined measures ensured that participant wellbeing, safety, and ethical compliance were firmly upheld.

3.10.4 Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity and positionality were very important in this research because they shape how knowledge is produced and understood. As Bourdieu (1999) explains, research is never neutral because it is carried out by people who are part of the social world they study. Reflexivity, therefore, is not about claiming objectivity but about being honest and aware of how one’s background, values, and experiences influence the research

process. Pillow (2003) describes reflexivity as a “practice of discomfort”, meaning that it requires the researcher to question their own role and assumptions. Similarly, Malterud (2001, p. 484) defines reflexivity as “attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process.” In this study, reflexivity means being open about how my experiences, identity, and worldview, which potentially influenced how I framed questions, collected data, and interpreted findings. It involves acknowledging that I am both part of and shaped by the world I study. By doing so, this research aimed to produce knowledge that is transparent, ethical, and sensitive to the realities of those involved.

I am a Black Shona man from Zimbabwe, and my identity plays an important role in how I understood and approached this study. I have lived in South Africa since 2015, moving between Gauteng and Durban, and later relocated to China. These experiences place me in both insider and outsider positions. As an insider, I share racial, cultural, and linguistic experiences with some participants, which helped me connect with them on a personal level. As an outsider, my international exposure and academic training allowed me to step back and analyse issues more critically and with some distance.

My identity and worldview are deeply shaped by the colonial histories of both Zimbabwe and South Africa. These two societies share a legacy of racial, economic, and social inequality that continue to influence everyday life. Although Zimbabwe did not have an official Apartheid system, it inherited racial divisions and economic hierarchies that placed Black people in subordinate positions. South Africa’s Apartheid system, on the

other hand, formalised racial segregation and institutionalised White dominance. In both contexts, colonialism created long-lasting systems that shaped who is seen as credible, civilised, or dangerous in society. As Fanon (1963) argues, colonialism is not only about physical domination but also about controlling how people think, see themselves, and see others.

These historical hierarchies continue to shape ideas of masculinity, morality, and truth in postcolonial South Africa. As a Black man, I live within and experience the weight of these inherited structures. The stereotypes that emerged under colonial rule still define how many people see Black men as hypersexual, violent, or morally suspect. These images were designed to justify colonial control over Black bodies and still persist in the social imagination. In South Africa, such stereotypes mean that many Black men, including migrants like me, are viewed with suspicion and fear. This resonates with Fanon's (1952) concept of the "fact of blackness" where the Black subject becomes trapped in an identity shaped by the fears and fantasies of others.

These experiences are not abstract, but rather they are lived and embodied. I have often found myself being questioned, stereotyped, or made to feel out of place because of my race and nationality. Such moments reminded me that I am not separate from the system I study, but a product of it. They also helped me understand how racialised power continues to define whose voices are heard and whose are silenced. Recognising this allowed me to approach my research with both empathy and critical awareness. My positionality, therefore, is not only a matter of identity, but also a way of

seeing how colonial legacies continue to shape systems of credibility, justice, and truth in the present.

My interest in this topic was also shaped by personal experience. At one point in my life, I faced the possibility of being falsely accused of rape. This experience gave me a deep understanding of the fear, shame, and uncertainty that accompany such situations. It showed me how quickly social judgment can replace fairness, and how power and perception can shape truth. As hooks (1994) explains, personal experience can be a valuable way of knowing, but it must be balanced with critical reflection to avoid turning research into autobiography. Guided by this view, I used my personal history not as the centre of the study, but as a source of empathy and motivation to better understand the realities of others who have faced similar circumstances.

Being aware of my emotional connection to the topic helped me to stay cautious about bias and interpretation. I recognised that my feelings of anger, fear, and vulnerability could influence how I viewed participants' stories and interpreted data. To manage this, I adopted reflexive strategies throughout the research process. As stated earlier, I kept a reflective journal after interviews, noting emotional reactions, questions, and observations that emerged during fieldwork. I also engaged in peer discussions and supervisor consultations to critically examine my assumptions and interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise that such practices help ensure trustworthiness and transparency by making the researcher's influence visible rather than hidden.

In this way, reflexivity became not only a theoretical concept but also a practical and emotional discipline. It required honesty about my own position and humility in recognising that my experiences are only one among many. This process of continuous reflection helped maintain a careful balance between personal insight and academic rigour, allowing the study to remain both empathetic and critically grounded. In this study, reflexivity functioned as both a practical and ethical framework that guided every stage of the research process. It served as a *mirror* and a *compass*, which means that it is a mirror for self-reflection and a compass for maintaining ethical direction. Through this process, I continuously examined how my beliefs, emotions, and social position shaped the research. This reflexive practice helped me to act with transparency and integrity while remaining critically aware of my role as a researcher.

By treating reflexivity as an ongoing ethical commitment rather than a single methodological step, the study ensured that knowledge production remains open, inclusive, and socially accountable. This approach supports Decolonial values of relationality, humility, and justice. It strengthens interpretive rigour, amplifies participants' voices, and resists the tendency to universalise or erase lived experiences. In this sense, reflexivity becomes both a method of inquiry and an act of epistemic resistance, that is, one that challenges dominant Eurocentric paradigms and promotes knowledge rooted in human experience, plurality, and respect.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined a critical and reflexive methodological framework designed to explore how race, gender, and power intersect in false rape allegations against Black

men in Gauteng, South Africa. Grounded in a Decolonial epistemological stance, the chapter positioned the study within the complex social, economic, and political realities that continue to shape post-Apartheid South Africa. Guided by border-thinking, the methodology acknowledged that knowledge is produced within liminal spaces between privilege and exclusion, where Black masculinities navigate ongoing systems of control and inequality. By contrasting ideals of justice and equality with the contested everyday realities marked by racial suspicion and unequal power, the study employed a mixed-methods approach to capture both structural and lived dimensions of experience. Overall, this methodology provides a strong and ethically grounded foundation for the empirical chapters that follow. It affirms a Decolonial and emancipatory approach to knowledge committed to amplifying silenced voices and dismantling dominant narratives that continue to define racialised gender relations in South Africa. The next chapter builds on this foundation by presenting a detailed and critically engaged analysis of the data, illuminating the lived experiences and social meanings that emerge from within these structures of power.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

“False allegations damage a man’s name forever; you are never seen the same again.”

(Male participant, 25–34, Soweto)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the study. It is primarily descriptive, focusing on the presentation of data gathered through both quantitative survey responses and qualitative narratives from participants. The deeper discussion and interpretation of these findings will take place in Chapter 5, using ideas from Foucault’s power theory, Connell’s hegemonic masculinity, and Crenshaw’s intersectionality.

The data in this chapter were collected from predominantly Black communities. Although these areas are in post-apartheid South Africa, they still show structural signs of apartheid. This means that even though apartheid has officially ended, many of its effects remain in the way people live and are treated.

Because of this, the data comes from what Fanon (1963) and Mbembe (2001) call the zone of non-being, a space where people continue to live with disadvantage and social exclusion. These are not neutral spaces; they are shaped by histories of control, surveillance, and racial inequality. The voices in this chapter, therefore, come from those who still live within the state of the Anthropos

The chapter starts with an overview of the response rate, the quality of the data, and the demographic details of the participants, such as their age, gender, race, and where they live. The results are then organised according to the main aims of the study. First, it looks at how people see false rape allegations in South Africa, their frequency, how openly they are discussed, and whether the laws that deal with them are seen as fair or effective. The quantitative data are supported by qualitative views from participants, showing how people think and feel about these issues.

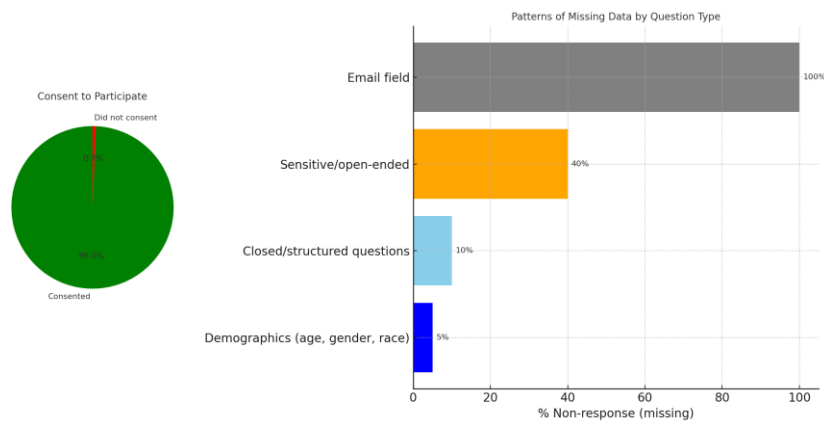
Next, it presents the consequences of false rape allegations, including how they affect the lives of accused men. These include stigma, job loss, mental distress, and imprisonment, as well as public views about accountability for women who make false claims. This is followed by the causes of false rape allegations, such as revenge, financial or legal gain, shame, misunderstanding of consent, and social pressure. Finally, it shows the suggested solutions from participants, such as stricter laws, fairer investigations, more education about consent and relationships, better police training, and awareness campaigns.

An important theme running through all the findings is intersectionality, how race, class, and gender combine to increase the vulnerability of Black men. However, behind all the data and numbers are deeper questions about whose voices are believed and whose experiences are ignored. These questions require a decolonial analysis, which will be explored in Chapter 5. The next section introduces the survey profile and demographic details, helping to connect the data to the real lives and experiences of the participants.

4.2 SURVEY PROFILE AND DATA QUALITY

A total of 300 survey responses were recorded, of which 298 (99.3%) provided consent and were retained for analysis. The survey ran between 19 August and 18 September 2025 and was administered anonymously, with most participants choosing not to share identifying details such as names or email addresses. In fact, the email field was left blank by all respondents, underscoring the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation. Patterns of missingness varied across questions, which means questions that participants wish to now answer. Demographic items such as age and gender were largely complete, with less than 5% non-response. By contrast, more sensitive or open-ended questions, for example, those asking about personal experiences or policy suggestions, showed higher non-response, reaching up to 35 to 40%. This reflects a common trend in sensitive surveys where participants are more willing to answer structured demographic and opinion items than provide detailed narratives. Overall, item-level missingness ranged from 0% to 100% (see Figure 4.1, for a visual summary and appendix A for detailed visuals).

Figure 4.1 Visual Summary



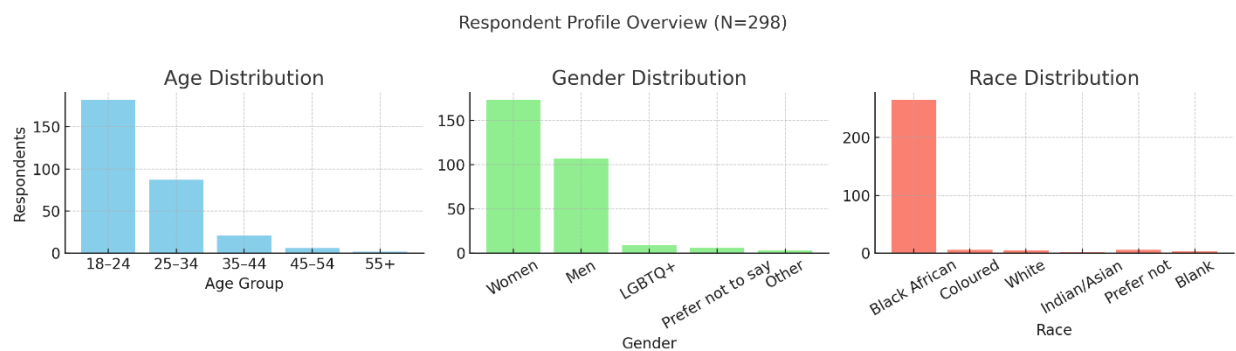
4.2.1 Respondent characteristics (Demographics)

The demographic profile of respondents shows a clear dominance of young adults. Over half of participants (61.0%, $n = 182$) were aged 18–24, followed by 29.0% ($n = 87$) in the 25–34 group. Smaller proportions were represented in the 35–44 group (7.0%, $n = 21$), 45–54 group (2.0%, $n = 6$), and those aged 55 and above (1.0%, $n = 2$). This indicates that the voices of younger respondents form the backbone of the study, reflecting the perspectives of a generation most engaged with debates around gender, justice, and social issues.

In terms of gender, the majority identified as women (58.0%, $n = 173$), followed by men (36.0%, $n = 107$). A smaller share identified as LGBTQ+ (3.0%, $n = 9$), while 2.0% ($n = 6$) preferred not to disclose, and 1.0% ($n = 3$) selected other categories. The racial distribution showed an overwhelming Black African majority (89.0%, $n = 265$), with

much smaller proportions identifying as Coloured (2.0%, $n = 6$), White (2.0%, $n = 5$), and Indian/Asian (1.0%, $n = 2$). Another 2.0% ($n = 6$) preferred not to disclose, and 1.0% ($n = 3$) left the item blank. These demographic patterns are illustrated in **Figure 4.2**, which combines age, gender, and race distributions into a single overview.

Figure 4.2: Respondent profile by age, gender, and race (N = 298).

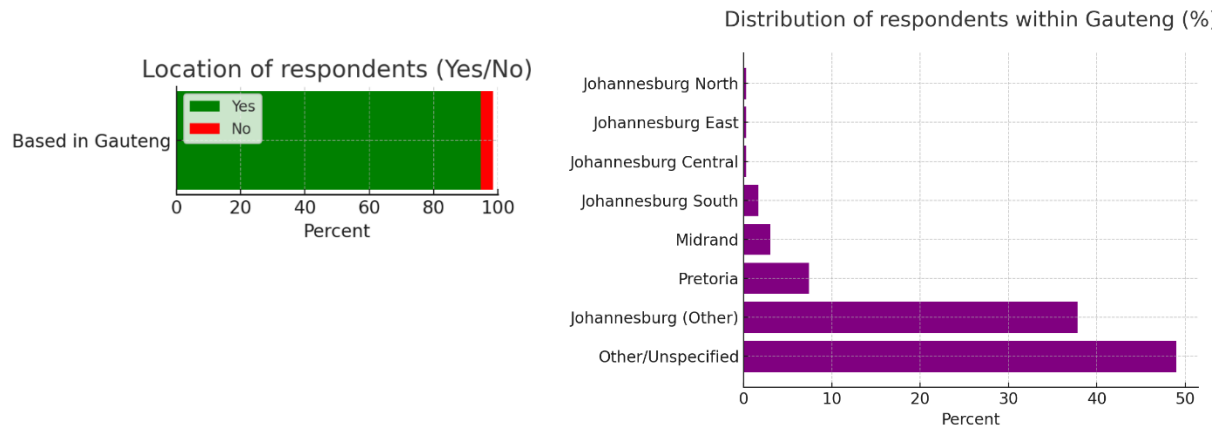


4.2.2 Location of respondents.

A large majority of respondents (approximately 97%, $n = 289$) indicated that they were currently based in Gauteng, while only a small proportion (about 3%, $n = 9$) reported residing elsewhere (Figure 4.3). Among those in Gauteng, nearly half (49.0%, $n = 145$) provided responses that were too general to classify beyond “Other/Unspecified.” Within the specified areas, Johannesburg accounted for the largest share, with 37.8% ($n = 112$) indicating residence in the city (including various suburbs not further defined). Pretoria was reported by 7.4% ($n = 22$) of respondents, Midrand by 3.0% ($n = 9$), and smaller proportions identified Johannesburg South (1.7%, $n = 5$), Central (0.3%, $n = 1$),

East (0.3%, n = 1), and North (0.3%, n = 1). These distributions are illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Location of respondents.



4.3 SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The purpose of this section is to present how participants understand and perceive the issue of false rape allegations in South Africa. Although the broader study investigates gendered power relations in cases involving Black men, this section does not analyse power directly. Instead, it reports what society believes about the existence of false rape allegations and who is most affected by them. These perceptions form an important foundation for later analysis. Chapter 5 will return to the theoretical discussion and examine whether, and how, these societal views connect to broader gendered dynamics and the experiences of Black men.

4.3.1 Community's Perceptions about the existence of False Rape Allegations

The findings show that respondents overwhelmingly agreed that false rape allegations occur in South Africa, with 96.7% ($n = 290$) saying “Yes”, compared to only 1.3% ($n = 4$) who said “No” and 2.0% ($n = 6$) who said “Maybe”.

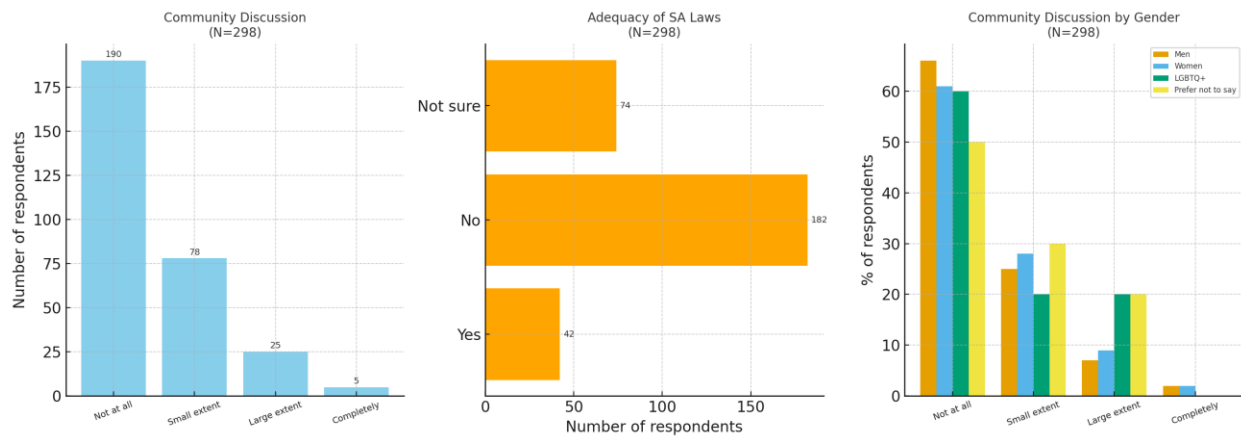
When asked whether these allegations are sufficiently discussed in communities, most respondents felt they were not. Nearly two-thirds (63.8%, $n = 190$) stated that the issue was “not at all” discussed, while just over a quarter (26.2%, $n = 78$) felt it was only addressed “to a small extent.” Very few reported broader discussions, with 8.4% ($n = 25$) selecting “to a large extent” and just 1.6% ($n = 5$) believing the matter is “completely” addressed. This pattern highlights a widespread perception that community dialogue around false rape allegations is limited and insufficient.

Respondents were also asked about the adequacy of South African laws in protecting individuals who are falsely accused of rape. A majority (61.1%, $n = 182$) felt that existing laws do not provide adequate protection. About one-quarter (24.8%, $n = 74$) were uncertain, while only a small minority (14.1%, $n = 42$) believed the laws were sufficient. These results suggest a lack of confidence in the legal system's ability to safeguard falsely accused individuals, reinforcing the view that reform or stronger protections may be required.

When responses were compared by gender identity, consistent patterns emerged. Men (66.0%) and women (61.0%) were most likely to state that false rape allegations are “not at all” discussed in their communities. A notable share of LGBTQ+ respondents

(20.0%) selected “to a large extent,” highlighting a slightly more diverse perception within this group. Those who preferred not to state their gender also leaned toward “not at all” (50.0%), though their responses were more evenly spread across other categories. This breakdown indicates that, while differences exist across groups, the dominant perception across identities is that false rape allegations are rarely addressed in South African communities.

Figure 4.4 Perceptions about the existence/occurrences of False Rape Allegations



4.3.2 Perceptions about the influence of location on false rape allegations

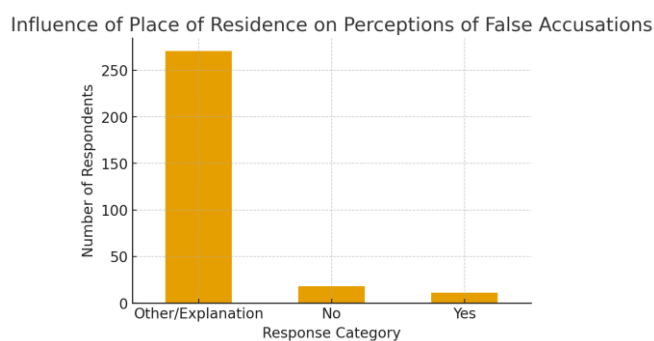
When asked whether where Black men live influences how they are viewed when accused of rape, only a small proportion of participants gave direct “Yes” or “No” responses. About 3.7% (n = 11) of respondents said yes, believing that location makes a difference. They argued that men from poorer or township areas are more likely to be stereotyped as violent or criminal, while men from wealthier areas are often given the

benefit of the doubt. In contrast, 6.0% (n = 18) said “No”, maintaining that false accusations can occur regardless of where a man lives.

The overwhelming majority (90.3%, n = 271) did not give a simple yes or no but instead offered explanations. Many of these responses suggested that environment and social class do play an indirect role, often shaping how communities, the media, or the police perceive accusations. For example, some pointed out that systemic over-policing in low-income areas fuels assumptions of guilt, while others linked wealth and status to protection from suspicion.

These findings show that while only a minority gave a clear yes/no, most participants viewed location as an important factor that interacts with class and social inequality in shaping how Black men are judged when accused of rape.

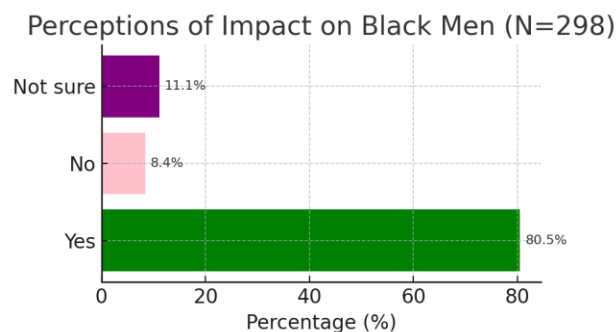
Fig 4.5 Geography and perceptions of False rape allegations



4.3.3 Experiences and Ramifications for Black Men Falsely Accused of Rape

The results indicate a strong perception that Black men are disproportionately affected by false rape allegations. A large majority of respondents (80.5%, $n = 240$) believed that Black men are more likely to be impacted compared to other racial groups. By contrast, only 8.4% ($n = 25$) disagreed, while 11.1% ($n = 33$) were uncertain. These results quantitatively indicate that Black men are perceived by most respondents (80.5%) as disproportionately impacted by false rape allegations.

Figure 4.5 Perceptions of Impact on Black Men



4.4 PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF FALSE RAPE ACCUSATIONS

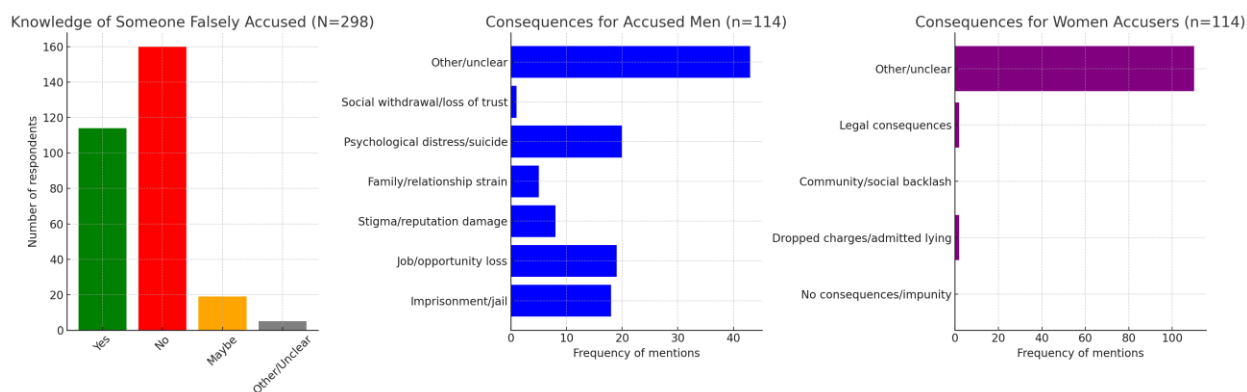
Respondents were asked whether they personally knew someone who had been falsely accused of rape. Just over half reported they did not (53.7%, $n = 160$), while 38.3% ($n = 114$) said they did, and 6.4% ($n = 19$) were uncertain. A small proportion ($\approx 1.6\%$, $n = 5$) gave ambiguous answers.

Follow-up responses from the 114 “Yes” participants were coded into consequence categories. For accused men, the most common outcomes included psychological

distress (20 mentions), loss of employment or opportunities (19), and imprisonment (18). Smaller numbers mentioned stigma and reputational harm (8), family or relationship strain (5), and social withdrawal (1). The remainder (43) were unclear or did not specify.

When asked about the consequences for the women who made the accusations, very few outcomes were reported. Only two respondents mentioned women admitting to lying or dropping charges, and another two noted legal consequences. Most responses (110) either did not mention accusers or were unclear, suggesting that respondents perceived women to face little or no accountability in these cases.

Figure 4.5 Knowledge of accused and consequence for the accused and accusers.



4.5 OVERALL PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS

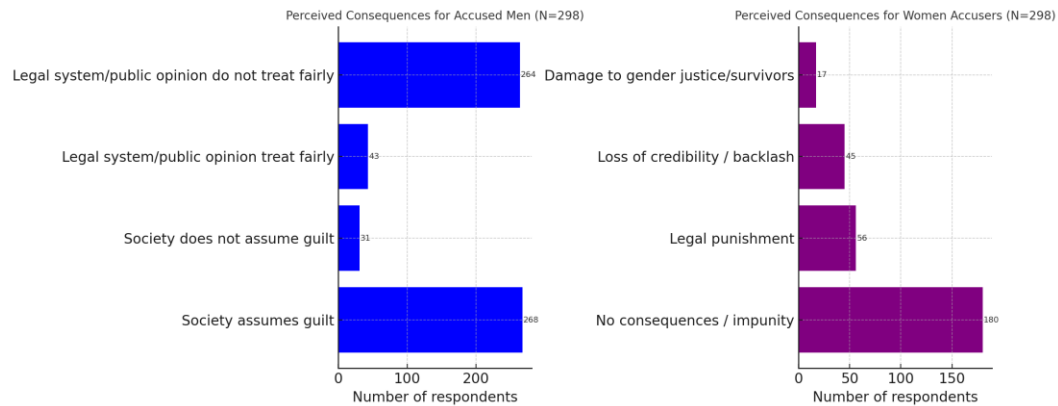
Across the full sample (N = 298), perceptions of the consequences of false rape allegations showed a stark imbalance between accused men and women accusers. When asked about the experiences of accused men, nearly nine out of ten respondents (89.9%, n = 268) agreed that society assumes Black men are guilty once an accusation

is made. A similar proportion (88.6%, n = 264) reported that the legal system and public opinion do not treat falsely accused Black men fairly. Only a small minority believed that society does not assume guilt (10.1%, n = 31) or that the legal system treats Black men fairly (14.4%, n = 43). These findings emphasise the widespread perception that accused Black men face systemic bias, with both societal and institutional structures reinforcing the presumption of guilt.

By contrast, when respondents were asked about the consequences for women who falsely accuse men of rape, most (60.4%, n = 180) stated that such women face no consequences at all. Smaller proportions identified legal punishment (18.8%, n = 56) or social backlash and loss of credibility (15.1%, n = 45) as possible outcomes. An even smaller share (5.7%, n = 17) pointed to broader harms such as damage to gender justice or undermining the credibility of genuine survivors.

Combined, these results highlight a perceived asymmetry between the two groups. Participants tended to view accused men as facing significant social stigma and systemic injustice, whereas women accusers were often perceived as experiencing limited accountability, with impunity emerging as a commonly cited outcome. It is important to note, however, that these findings reflect *participants' perceptions* rather than empirically verified realities. The perspectives reported here therefore speak to how individuals interpret fairness, power dynamics, and the broader societal implications of false rape allegations in South Africa, rather than providing conclusive evidence about actual systemic patterns see Figure 4.6 below.

Figure 4.6: Overall perceived consequences of false rape allegations

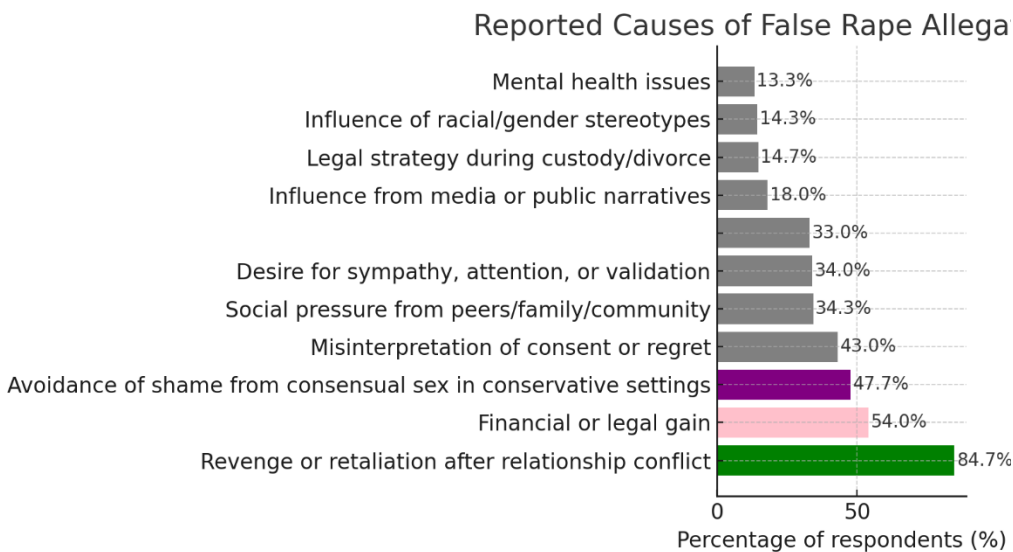


4.6 PERCEPTIONS ON THE CAUSES OF FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS

The study found that three causes dominate participants' perceptions of why false rape allegations may occur. In this category, participants were given options to choose what they considered to be the top three causes of false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa. Revenge or retaliation after relationship conflict or breakup was reported by the largest proportion of respondents ($\approx 84.7\%$, $n = 254$). This was followed by financial or legal gain ($\approx 54.0\%$, $n = 162$) and avoidance of shame for consensual sex being discovered by families or communities ($\approx 47.7\%$, $n = 143$). These findings suggest that interpersonal disputes, material incentives, and cultural sanctions are viewed as the strongest drivers behind false accusations.

Other reasons were less common but still significant. Misinterpretation of consent or regret was noted by $\approx 43.0\%$ ($n = 129$) of respondents, while social pressure from peers, family, or community was reported by $\approx 34.3\%$ ($n = 103$). Although not as widely cited as the top three causes, these responses highlight how broader social influences and communication challenges potentially contribute to the complexity of the issue.

Figure 4.7 Perceived causes of False rape allegations.



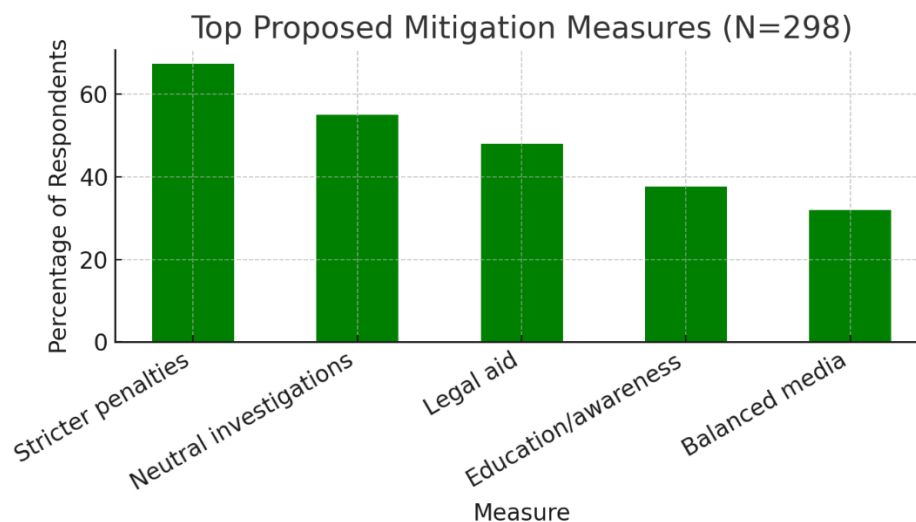
4.7 PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES

The study found that the most frequently proposed measure to address false rape allegations was the introduction of stricter legal penalties for false accusers, with 67.4% ($n = 201$) of respondents supporting this option. This reflects a strong belief that accountability and deterrence should be reinforced through the justice system.

In addition, more than half of respondents (55.0%, $n = 164$) suggested that there is need for independent or neutral investigation bodies, pointing to concerns about bias in existing processes. Nearly half (48.0%, $n = 143$) also highlighted the importance of providing legal aid and support for accused men, suggesting that current systems often leave them without adequate resources or protection.

Other strategies were mentioned less frequently but remain important. Over one-third of respondents (37.6%, $n = 112$) called for community education and awareness initiatives, while 31.9% ($n = 95$) suggested the need for balanced media coverage to reduce one-sided narratives. A small minority (6.0%, $n = 18$) put forward other measures, indicating more diverse but less widely shared perspectives.

Figure 4.7: Proposed measures to reduce or prevent false rape allegations



4.8 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This section is organised around the major themes that emerged from participants' responses. These themes reflect not only the causes of false rape allegations but also their wide-ranging effects, the lack of accountability for accusers, and the measures proposed to reduce the problem. A cross-cutting theme of intersectionality also runs through the findings, showing how race and gender combine to intensify the experiences of Black men. These themes are presented in the sections that follow, with illustrative quotes provided to show how participants expressed their views in their own words.

In addition to themes of power, gender, and race, participants also reflected on how broader social contexts, such as where Black men live, shape perceptions of false rape allegations. These insights highlighted that environment, class, and place of residence can intersect with other forms of bias to influence how accusations are received.

4.9 GENDERED POWER AND SOCIAL BIAS

Participants consistently described how false rape allegations are shaped by power relations and social bias. When asked *Do you think power plays a role in false rape allegations?*, the majority of respondents said it does, explaining that accusations were often used as a means of control or retaliation. Many men pointed to situations where women were perceived to use allegations deliberately to gain an upper hand, especially during disputes or after failed relationships. Others described the imbalance at a broader social level, where women's accounts were automatically given more weight, leaving accused men at a disadvantage. One male participant summed this up by

saying, *“People always believe women first, even when there is no proof”* (Male, 25–34, Gauteng).

Several respondents connected false allegations with the strategic use of power. One woman observed that *“False allegations are used as a weapon to control men”* (Female, 35–44, Johannesburg). Queer participants also raised this theme, stressing that false accusations sometimes emerged from anger or conflict, showing how allegations could reflect intersections of power, vulnerability, and retaliation.

Historical and structural inequalities were another layer of this theme. Some participants linked current patterns of mistrust toward Black men to apartheid legacies and broader economic inequality. One respondent put it plainly: *“Yes, apartheid history makes Black men more vulnerable to suspicion”* (Male, 35–44, Gauteng). Others reflected on how stereotypes intersect with race and gender, reinforcing a presumption of guilt: *“Men are guilty until proven innocent, especially if Black”* (Male, 24–34, Pretoria).

This highlights that most respondents understood that false rape allegations not simply as individual acts, but as phenomena deeply rooted in gendered power dynamics, racial stereotypes, and social bias. This convergence of themes demonstrates that power was viewed as central to both the making of accusations and the way such cases are received in society.

4.10 INFLUENCE OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Participants also reflected on whether where Black men live influences how they are viewed when accused of rape. While only a few gave direct “yes” or “no” answers, most provided explanations that linked environment, class, and social status to how accusations are received.

Several respondents argued that men from poorer or township communities are more likely to be seen as guilty because of stigma. As one explained,

“Poorer regions may have a higher prevalence of this strictly because of the stigma that poor people are violent and do things because they have nothing to lose. Whereas in rich areas, a man can be falsely accused and no one believes it simply because he has money and status.” (Male, 25–34, Gauteng).

Others pointed to the role of over-policing and stereotypes stemming from media coverage. A participant highlighted,

“In low-income urban areas, accusations may be met with assumptions of criminality due to systemic over-policing and media portrayals of these neighborhoods as violent or lawless.” (Female, 35–44, Johannesburg).

At the same time, some disagreed, stating that residence should not matter since false accusations can occur anywhere. One man argued,

“No, where they live has nothing to do with how they are viewed. If anything, men in any demographic may or may not be guilty.” (Male, 18–24, Pretoria).

Overall, these perspectives show that many participants believed environment and class intersect with race to shape how Black men are judged when accused of rape. This highlights the importance of considering social location alongside power and gender bias in understanding false rape allegations.

4.11 PERCEPTIONS ON CAUSES OF FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS

To the question “What are the top 3 common reasons people may falsely accuse someone of rape?”, a range of explanations emerged. These responses highlighted both personal motivations and wider social pressures that drive false accusations. The most frequently cited causes were revenge or retaliation after conflict or breakup, financial or legal gain, avoidance of shame or exposure, misinterpretation of consent or regret, and social pressure from family, peers, or community. The following subsections present each of the five main perceived causes in detail, supported by respondents’ own words.

4.11.1 Revenge or Retaliation after Conflict or Breakup

One of the strongest patterns in the data was the belief that false rape allegations are often made as a form of revenge or retaliation, particularly after disagreements, failed relationships, or conflict between partners. Respondents described how accusations

could be used as a weapon when emotions were high or when relationships ended badly.

Several participants expressed this view directly. One woman noted, *“False allegations are used as a weapon to control men”* (Female, 35–44, Johannesburg). Another respondent explained, *“If the relationship ends badly, some women accuse men to punish them”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). A younger male participant added, *“It is a way to get back at men when there is anger or jealousy”* (Male, 18–24, Soweto).

Others linked retaliation to power struggles within relationships. As one woman observed, *“Some do it out of anger, when they feel rejected or hurt”* (Female, 25–34, Gauteng). Another respondent emphasized how accusations were tied to personal vendettas, saying, *“When there is a fight, they use rape as the easiest way to destroy a man’s life”* (Male, 35–44, Midrand).

4.11.2 Financial or Legal Gain

Another recurring explanation offered by participants was the pursuit of financial or legal gain. Many respondents believed that false rape allegations were sometimes made strategically to access money, benefits or leverage in disputes such as divorce, child maintenance, or inheritance claims.

One man explained, *“Some do it for money, knowing the man will pay to protect his name”* (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). Another highlighted the link to family disputes, saying, *“Women accuse men so they can benefit financially, especially during divorce or*

maintenance cases” (Female, 25–34, Pretoria). For some participants, the legal system itself was seen as complicit, with one noting, *“They know the law will protect them first, so it is easy to make a claim to get something out of it”* (Male, 35–44, Soweto).

On the other hand, some participants connected false allegations to opportunism, describing them as a means to secure financial advantage or exert legal pressure. As one respondent observed, *“It’s about getting compensation; they see an easy way to gain from the system”* (Female, 18–24, Pretoria).

4.11.3 Avoidance of Shame or Exposure

Respondents also frequently linked false rape allegations to attempts at avoiding shame or exposure. In many cases, participants believed that accusations were used to cover up consensual sexual encounters, particularly when discovered by family members, partners, or communities. For these respondents, false allegations served as a defense mechanism in contexts where cultural or social expectations condemned premarital or extramarital sex.

One young woman noted, *“When a girl is caught with a boyfriend, she says it was rape to avoid being judged”* (Female, 18–24, Johannesburg). Another participant echoed this, explaining, *“In strict families, they will say rape because admitting the truth brings shame”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). Some respondents pointed out that fear of punishment or rejection drove this response, with one stating, *“They use it as an excuse when they don’t want their parents or husband to know the truth”* (Female, 25–34, Gauteng).

Others framed this avoidance of shame as a social strategy to protect reputation. One man explained, *“It is a way to hide mistakes and keep the family name clean”* (Male, 35–44, Soweto). Another added, *“They accuse men to escape embarrassment, especially in religious homes”* (Female, 18–24, Pretoria). This shows the complexity of false rape allegations and how women potentially leverage the fact that they are easily believed by society.

4.11.4 Misinterpretation of Consent or Regret

Another recurring explanation provided by participants was the misinterpretation of consent or regret following a sexual encounter. Respondents described how situations that began as consensual could later be reframed as rape, often due to regret, confusion, or social pressure. For many, this was tied to blurred communication, alcohol or drug use, or shifting feelings after the fact.

One man explained, *“Sometimes a woman agrees, but later she regrets and says it was rape”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). Another participant who mentioned that they knew someone who was falsely accused added that, in the instance of that man, *“It happens when there is alcohol or drugs, and later she says she never consented”* (Female, 18–24, Midrand). Others pointed to pressure from families or communities, with one respondent noting, *“A girl can consent, but when people find out, she says it was rape to protect herself”* (Male, 25–34, Soweto).

Some respondents also reflected on misunderstandings around consent, suggesting that lack of clear communication created room for allegations. As one participant

explained that, *“Sometimes men think there is agreement, but later she says there wasn’t”* (Female, 35–44, Johannesburg). This brings in the question of how consent should be understood and probably be measured. Is it a continuous process that when being intimate every now and then one has to ask her if she is still consenting?

4.11.5 Social Pressure from Family, Peers, or Community

Respondents also highlighted the role of social and community pressure in driving false rape allegations as seen in most responses above. In these cases, women were described as being influenced or even compelled by external forces such as families, peers, or community leaders to make false accusations they might not have otherwise pursued. For many participants, this reflected broader cultural expectations around honour, shame, and reputation.

One man explained, *“Sometimes families force the girl to say it was rape because they do not want to be embarrassment”* (Male, 35–44, Gauteng). Another participant, talking about the account of someone they claimed they know who was falsely accused, added that, *“It is done because of community pressure; people push her to accuse even when she didn’t want to”* (Female, 25–34, Pretoria). Some respondents stressed that these pressures often arose in conservative or religious environments where sexual activity outside marriage was heavily condemned. As one respondent put it, *“She may be told to accuse him to save the family’s name”* (Male, 25–34, Soweto).

Others noted that peer influence also played a role. One young woman remarked, *“Sometimes friends encourage false claims, especially when they think the man treated*

her badly” (Female, 18–24, Johannesburg). In these accounts, false allegations were framed as less an individual decision and more a collective act shaped by social norms and group expectations.

4.12 EFFECTS OF FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS ON BLACK MEN.

Different effects of false rape allegations against Black men were mentioned by participants. The findings reveal that these allegations are perceived to have far-reaching consequences that go beyond the immediate accusation. Respondents highlighted psychological distress, social stigma, financial strain, damage to family relationships, and long-lasting reputational harm as some of the main outcomes. Many also pointed to legal consequences such as wrongful arrests or imprisonment, which intensify the sense of injustice experienced by falsely accused men.

4.12.1 Stigma and Reputational Loss

When respondents were asked about the consequences of false rape allegations, one of the most common issues raised was stigma and reputational loss. Participants consistently described how accusations leave a lasting mark, even when innocence is proven. For many, stigma was seen as a “permanent label” that shaped how Black men are perceived in their communities, workplaces, and families.

Several participants stressed that stigma lingers long after legal outcomes. Responding to the question about challenges that Black men they know who were falsely accused of rape faced, one man explained, *“He is stigmatized, even after being found innocent”*

(Male, 25–34, Gauteng), while another observed, *“Accused men are judged harshly, and the shame never leaves”* (Male, 35–44, Pretoria). A young woman also highlighted the breadth of this impact: *“They lose jobs and relationships because the community believes the woman first”* (Female, 18–24, Johannesburg).

Other respondents pointed to how stigma undermines dignity and identity. One participant stated, *“False allegations damage a man’s name forever; you are never seen the same again”* (Male, 25–34, Soweto). Another added, *“Once you are accused, people withdraw from you, even your own family distances themselves”* (Female, 35–44, Pretoria). These examples illustrate that stigma was understood not only as reputational damage but also as deep social exclusion.

4.12.2 Mental and Emotional Trauma

When respondents were asked other ways black men suffer from false rape allegations, many described the mental and emotional toll on Black men who had been falsely accused of rape. The accounts consistently pointed to deep stress, depression, and in some cases suicidal thoughts. For several participants, the emotional impact was viewed as more damaging than the legal process itself because it undermined confidence, identity, and dignity.

One male respondent reflected, *“False accusations break men mentally; some end up with depression”* (Male, 25–34, Midrand). Another shared the severity of this strain, stating, *“The stress is unbearable and leads to thoughts of suicide”* (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg South). A woman also recognised the emotional weight of stigma, noting,

“It is an emotional trauma that destroys their confidence and identity” (Female, 25–34, Pretoria).

Other participants added that men often withdrew socially because of false allegations, experiencing isolation and an inability to trust others. For example, on account of someone they claimed they know who was falsely accused of rape, one responded noted, *“He lost himself completely, became quiet, and shut people out”* (Female, 35–44, Gauteng). Another echoed this with the comment, *“They walk with shame every day, even when cleared”* (Male, 18–24, Soweto). These views add to the idea of the ‘permanent label’ that is left on a man accused of rape whether the accusations are true or not.

4.12.3 Professional and Financial Loss

To the question, *“How do false rape allegations impact Black men’s social, professional, and personal lives?”*, many pointed to the professional and financial consequences that followed. Participants described how allegations often led to job loss, income instability, and the erosion of career opportunities, even when men were eventually cleared of wrongdoing.

Several participants emphasised the devastating impact of losing employment. One man noted, *“Lose jobs, income, family and social exclusion”* (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). Another echoed how stigma affects employability, stating, *“Reputation degrading; you won’t get jobs due to those allegations and people won’t like to*

associate with you” (Female, 25–34, Pretoria). A middle-aged respondent echoed this point: *“They get fired at work, viewed as bad people in society”* (Male, 35–44, Gauteng).

Others reflected on how false allegations could undo years of effort and success. One participant warned that, *“False rape allegations can make a rich, successful and dignified Black man into nothing in an instant”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). These comments highlight that the impact of accusations extends beyond individual reputation to long-term economic security and professional identity.

4.12.4 Legal and Systemic Strain

When respondents were asked, *“Do you think the legal system and public opinion treat Black men falsely accused of rape fairly?”*, many described the legal and systemic burdens created by false rape allegations. Participants highlighted how accusations led to stressful and costly legal processes, long trials, and in some cases even incarceration. For several respondents, the justice system was not seen as a place of protection, but as an extension of the harm already caused by stigma.

Respondents stressed how these processes consume time and resources. One participant reflected,

“These false rape allegations ruin Black men’s lives, their families and even their careers ... sometimes because they get penalised to do real jail time. It really affects their lives as a whole in a negative way” (Female, 25–34, Gauteng).

Another described the cost of delayed justice, noting,

“In some cases the man’s innocence is proven after years, and you think yes your reputation has in a way been redeemed, but you have lost time being locked up” (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg).

Others drew attention to the way legal systems overlap with social prejudice, creating enduring barriers even after acquittal. One man explained,

“No one would want to hire a rapist ... because of a woman who doesn’t think twice to put men in prison because of money and selfishness” (Male, 25–34, Pretoria).

Another observed, based on lived experiences of a family member who was falsely accused, “*The law listens to her first; he is forced to fight for his life from day one*” (Male, 18–24, Soweto). This presents the legal process as widely experienced as a site of harm. Rather than restoring justice, participants described how systemic bias, prolonged trials, and financial costs compounded the trauma of false accusations, leaving men and their families permanently disadvantaged.

4.12.5 Isolation and Broken Relationships

To the question, “*What other ways could false rape allegations affect Black men?*”, many pointed to the loss of relationships and social isolation that often followed. Participants described how families, friends, and partners tended to distance themselves once a man was accused, regardless of whether he was later proven innocent.

Several respondents reflected on how quickly support networks could collapse. One explained, *“Once you are accused, even your own family distances themselves”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). Another added, *“Friends and loved ones no longer trust you; they don’t want to be seen with you”* (Female, 35–44, Johannesburg).

Others highlighted the breakdown of intimate and family relationships. One participant noted, *“Wives leave, children are taken away, and men are left alone”* (Male, 35–44, Soweto). Another, based on lived experience, echoed this sentiment saying, *“He lost everything, including his marriage, because people believed the allegation”* (Female, 25–34, Midrand). For many, isolation was not just emotional but structural, leading to separation, divorce, and estrangement from children. These narratives suggest that accusations not only damage reputation but also disrupt the bonds of trust that hold social and family life together.

4.13 PROPOSED MEASURES TO REDUCE FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS

When asked about ways to reduce or prevent false rape allegations, participants offered ideas that pointed in two main directions: stronger punishment for those who make false claims, and broader changes in how society handles such cases. On one side, many called for harsher legal consequences, better screening of cases, and fairer investigations. On the other, respondents stressed the need for education, awareness campaigns, and support systems for men who are falsely accused. Together, these responses show that people saw solutions not only in the courtroom but also in communities, schools, and the media.

4.13.1 Stricter Legal Penalties

The most frequently mentioned measure was the introduction of harsher punishments for those who make false accusations. Respondents felt strongly that women who falsely accuse should face the same weight of the law as those accused of rape. One participant explained, *“There must be strict punishment for false accusers”* (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg), while another added, *“They must be arrested and jailed because they destroy lives”* (Female, 35–44, Pretoria).

Beyond imprisonment, others emphasised financial accountability. As one man suggested, *“They should pay fines so that people learn not to lie”* (Male, 18–24, Soweto). This idea of compensation or penalties was tied to the belief that consequences must be serious enough to deter false claims.

Many respondents explicitly emphasised the need for stronger accountability measures. In the survey, 257 participants selected *“Stricter legal consequences for proven false accusers,”* while 253 selected *“Harsher penalties for false accusers.”* Participants also connected these punitive measures to broader legal reforms. Notably, 172 respondents supported *“clear definitions of false allegations,”* 107 supported the establishment of *“independent investigation bodies,”* and 125 endorsed *“gender-neutral sexual offence laws.”* Together, these selections indicate that respondents were not merely calling for harsher punishment; rather, many viewed these measures as part of a wider effort to promote fairness, legal clarity, and consistency within South Africa’s justice system.

4.13.2 Education on Consent and Relationships

Beyond punishment, many respondents stressed that prevention should begin with education. Participants argued that schools, families, and communities must teach young people about consent, respect, and accountability. A young woman suggested, *“Teach children from a young age about what consent means”* (Female, 18–24, Johannesburg). A male participant echoed this call, saying, *“Workshops are needed so that both men and women understand the seriousness of rape and false accusations”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria).

Education was also described as a collective responsibility that should extend beyond schools into broader community spaces. One respondent explained, *“People must be taught in churches, schools, and workplaces so everyone knows the truth”* (Female, 35–44, Midrand). Similarly, some participants stressed that community education could help challenge stigma and misinformation, while others stressed the need for practical education programmes combined with awareness campaigns to reach rural and semi-urban areas.

Respondents also framed education as a long-term solution, noting that early interventions could prevent both rape and false accusations in the future. As one young woman put it, *“If children grow up knowing what is right and wrong, there will be less confusion and fewer lies”* (Female, 18–24, Tembisa). Others reinforced the idea that education should include both genders equally, with one participant noting that *“Men and women must both be taught, because false allegations hurt everyone”* (Male, 24–

34, Pretoria). This shows the importances of knowledge and education in reducing social ills.

4.13.3 Police and Investigator Training

Participants also identified problems in the way cases are handled by law enforcement. They described police as too quick to act on accusations without thorough investigation. One man explained, *“Police must be trained to investigate carefully and not just believe the first story”* (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). A female respondent agreed, noting, *“Officers need to be neutral and gather evidence fairly”* (Female, 35–44, Pretoria). Others stressed that inadequate training leads to wrongful arrests. To that effect, one participant noted, *“They should check facts properly before arresting someone, because once you are arrested, people believe you are guilty”* (Male, 18–24, Soweto).

Additionally, some respondents reiterated the importance of evidence-based policing, stating that investigations should always rely on facts rather than assumptions. Some highlighted that bias training is urgently needed so that officers can handle sensitive cases without pre-judging men. Similarly, a Black African man from Johannesburg argued, *“Without proper investigation, even innocent men end up stigmatised,”* (Male, 24–34, Johannesburg), pointing to the long-term harm caused by premature arrests.

4.13.4 Stronger Screening Before Charges

Related to police work, respondents also called for safeguards to ensure cases only proceed to court when supported by solid evidence. Many argued that men were being

pushed into lengthy trials without proof. One participant explained, *“There should be proof before a case goes to court”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). Another reinforced this point: *“Investigations must be complete before charges, not after”* (Female, 35–44, Johannesburg). For others, the issue was one of fairness, with one man noting, *“It is not right to destroy a man’s life when there is no solid evidence”* (Male, 18–24, Midrand).

4.13.5 Support Systems for the Falsely Accused

Respondents also highlighted the need for structured support to help men rebuild their lives after false accusations. This included counselling, legal aid, and reintegration into their communities. One woman explained, *“They need counselling because the accusations destroy them emotionally”* (Female, 25–34, Pretoria). A male respondent stressed the importance of access to justice, saying, *“Legal aid should be provided so that innocent men can defend themselves”* (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg). Others stressed the need for restoring dignity after acquittal, with one participant commenting, *“After being cleared, there must be support to help them get back their jobs and dignity”* (Male, 25–34, Soweto).

4.13.6 Public Awareness Campaigns and Balanced Media Coverage

Finally, participants called for change in the way society talks about false allegations. They argued that the media often reports accusations but not when claims are proven false, leaving men’s reputations permanently damaged. One man suggested, *“The media should report when the case is false, not just when it starts”* (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). A young woman added, *“Awareness campaigns are needed to educate*

society that false allegations are also harmful” (Female, 18–24, Pretoria). Others called for greater fairness, with one respondent noting, *“The news must be balanced so both sides are shown”* (Male, 35–44, Midrand).

Overall, these measures highlight how respondents believed the problem of false rape allegations could be reduced through a balance of legal accountability, education, institutional reform, and broader social change. While many focused on practical steps, participants also noted that the issue cannot be separated from wider patterns of power, race, and gender dynamics that shape the vulnerability of Black men in South Africa.

Participants’ proposals hint at a longing for justice beyond law, what Mignolo might call *border thinking*, where alternative ways of knowing and healing become possible. From these practical recommendations, the discussion turns toward the deeper intersection of race and gender that underpins participants’ perspectives.

4.14 INTERSECTION OF RACE AND GENDER IN FALSE RAPE ALLEGATIONS

When participants were asked about the broader dynamics behind false rape allegations, many highlighted the intersection of race and gender. Respondents described how being both Black and male heightened vulnerability, with racial stereotypes and gendered assumptions working together to disadvantage accused men.

Several respondents directly linked race to assumptions of guilt. One explained, *“As a Black man, you are already seen as dangerous, so people believe it quickly”* (Male, 25–

34, Johannesburg). Another echoed this, stating, *“Race makes it worse — if you are Black, society assumes guilt”* (Male, 35–44, Pretoria). These views reflect the widespread perception that racial bias intersects with gender norms, leaving Black men particularly exposed.

Others commented on how social narratives tend to privilege women’s accounts, creating an imbalance when accusations arise. As one woman put it, *“Society sides with women, and men, especially Black men, are condemned first”* (Female, 35–44, Johannesburg). Another participant described how this dual bias shapes outcome: *“Power matters in false accusations of rape, carried and backed up by societal criticism”* (Female, 25–34, Gauteng). This intersection of race and gender was seen as amplifying the risks for Black men, compounding stigma, and reinforcing stereotypes that shape how accusations are received by communities and institutions.

This intersection of race and gender exposes the double bind of Black masculinity, a product of what Fanon terms “epidermalisation of inferiority” and what Mignolo sees as epistemic exclusion. The following section builds on this insight by examining how accountability, or lack thereof, for accusers reinforces these intersecting inequities.

4.15 RAMIFICATIONS TO THE ACCUSERS

4.15.1 Lack of Consequences for Accusers

When respondents were asked about what happens to women who falsely accuse men of rape, the majority said that there are very few real consequences. Most participants

felt that such women “get away with it,” and that accountability is almost non-existent. As one male respondent put it, *“Nothing happens to women who lie, they just walk away”* (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg). A female participant, speaking on account of a relative who was falsely accused, echoed this perception about the women who falsely accused men, saying, *“Even if the truth comes out, she is not punished”* (Female, 25–34, Gauteng).

Others expressed frustration that the justice system fails to act, leaving men to suffer reputational and emotional damage without any balancing accountability. One participant explained, *“They know the law will protect them first, so it is easy to make a claim to get something out of it”* (Male, 35–44, Soweto). Another respondent added that this imbalance creates a wider problem for genuine survivors, arguing, *“It makes real victims less believed, which is unfair”* (Male, 24–34, Pretoria).

4.15.2 Credibility Loss

While most participants believed there are no real punishments, some suggested that women who make false accusations eventually lose credibility. This was described as a gradual social penalty where their voices become less trusted over time. For example, one man explained, *“It makes real victims less believed, which is unfair”* (Male, 24–34, Pretoria). Another respondent added, *“When women lie, it damages their own credibility and makes people doubt all women”* (Female, 18–24, Johannesburg). Although this consequence was mentioned more frequently than legal ones, it was seen as indirect and insufficient compared to the harm caused to accused men.

4.15.3 Rare Legal Punishment

A smaller group of participants noted that, in rare cases, women may face formal consequences such as fines, court proceedings, or even imprisonment. However, these outcomes were consistently described as exceptions rather than the norm. One respondent explained, *“Sometimes they can go to jail or pay fines, but it almost never happens”* (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating, *“There should be punishment for accusing a man, but it hardly ever gets that far”* (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). A third respondent added, *“False accusers should face the same sentence the man could have faced, but that is not what happens in reality”* (Male, 35–44, Gauteng). Similarly, another participant noted, *“Punishment only happens if it’s proven in court, and that is very rare”* (Male, 25–34, Gauteng). Collectively, these views highlight that while respondents recognised the possibility of legal consequences, they overwhelmingly perceived such outcomes as too infrequent to meaningfully deter false allegations.

4.15.4 Perceived Impunity

Finally, many participants tied these views together by highlighting a pervasive sense of impunity. Across different age and gender groups, respondents expressed the belief that women who falsely accuse men of rape are effectively shielded from responsibility. One male respondent captured this sentiment directly while discussing his friend who he claimed was falsely accused: *“Women can lie and nothing happens — the man’s life is destroyed, and she just carries on”* (Male, 35–44, Midrand). Similar frustration

appeared throughout the dataset. Another participant remarked, *“There should be punishment for accusing a man, but it hardly ever gets that far”* (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). A third added, *“False accusers should face the same sentence the man could have faced, but that is not what happens in reality”* (Male, 35–44, Gauteng). Others echoed this, with one respondent noting, *“Punishment only happens if it’s proven in court, and that is very rare”* (Male, 25–34, Gauteng).

This perception of one-sided justice was repeatedly emphasised, with men in particular arguing that the lack of consequences deepens existing inequalities and undermines fairness within the legal system. Taken together, these sub-themes show that respondents overwhelmingly perceive women who falsely accuse men of rape as facing little to no accountability. Where consequences do occur, they are more often social, such as credibility loss, rather than formal legal punishment. For many, this imbalance compounds the injustice experienced by falsely accused men and weakens the legitimacy of genuine survivors’ voices. The near absence of accountability raises broader questions about whose words are treated as truth, a politics of credibility that Chapter 5 situates within colonial and patriarchal power structures.

4.16 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the findings of the study, combining quantitative survey data and qualitative insights to show how false rape allegations against Black men are understood and experienced in South Africa. The findings revealed that most respondents believe false rape allegations occur, yet they are rarely discussed and poorly addressed by current laws. Both statistical patterns and personal accounts

highlighted a climate of silence and limited dialogue. The consequences for accused men were shown to be severe, and most participants believed that women who falsely accuse face little or no accountability. This imbalance raised concerns about fairness and power in social and legal responses. Building on this foundation, Chapter 5 moves from presentation to analysis and interpretation. It uses multi-theoretical lenses, including power, intersectionality, and hegemonic masculinity, to explore the theatre of power, the construction of race and gender, and how these forces sustain false rape allegations in post-apartheid South Africa. While Chapter 4 was descriptive, Chapter 5 becomes analytical and critical, unpacking how truths are produced under continuing colonial and patriarchal power.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

“Stigma is a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity.”

Erving Goffman, *Stigma* (1963)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues with the argument that false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa operate through intersecting systems of disciplinary, gendered, racial and colonial power (Foucault, 1977; Connell, 1995; Mignolo, 2007). Drawing on Foucault's concept of disciplinary surveillance, Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, Ratele's (2017) work on African masculinities, Fanon's (1967) critique of racialised being, and Anzaldúa's (1987) and Mignolo's (2011) notions of the borderland and border thinking, the chapter extends from findings how these theoretical frameworks converge to explain how Black men become uniquely vulnerable to suspicion, stigma, and epistemic exclusion. Several sub-arguments guide the discussion: that disciplinary power attaches unevenly to racialised bodies; that gendered hierarchies position Black masculinities as inherently suspect; that coloniality structures credibility and truth; and that the falsely accused man inhabits a border space where competing systems of power meet. While these theories collectively strengthen this analysis, the chapter recognises that each framework has limitations and that a multi-theoretical approach is necessary for grappling with a phenomenon as multilayered as false rape allegations.

Empirically, the chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4 and situates them within these theoretical debates. The first section examines how participants describe discursive power through perceptions of automatic suspicion and social surveillance; the second analyses how gendered hierarchies shape assumptions about guilt; the third considers how colonial histories and racial scripts inform public understandings of Black male sexuality; and the final section explores participants' views on impunity, injustice, and the absence of meaningful accountability for false accusers. Although the data reflects perceptions rather than objective legal realities, these narratives illuminate how power is felt, narrated, and resisted in the lived experiences of participants. By outlining these themes, the chapter demonstrates how everyday interpretations of false rape allegations both reveal and challenge the colonial, gendered racial and disciplinary structures that shape Black men's vulnerability in contemporary South Africa.

5.2 RACIALISED DISCURSIVE POWER AND THE PRODUCTION OF SUBORDINATE BLACK MASCULINITY

The findings of this study reveal that the credibility of Black men in cases of rape allegations is closely connected to what Mills (1998: 95) describes as the social ontology of race. Participants from the Gauteng cohort consistently expressed feelings of being automatically viewed with suspicion, reflecting the racial assumptions embedded within society and the justice system. These experiences align with Mills' (1997: 59) argument that racial structures often position Black people as inherently linked to criminality and social transgression. Drawing on Mignolo's (2002: 927) concept of epistemic privilege, this study argues that the lived experiences of the participants should not be dismissed as merely personal opinions or isolated incidents. Instead, they

represent important forms of knowledge that reveal the continued influence of colonial power relations in contemporary South Africa. The findings further suggest that the legal system can operate in ways that reproduce racial inequalities by undermining the credibility and humanity of Black men, even in cases where there is limited or insufficient evidence against them (Mills 1997: 59).

The findings from this study also suggest that false rape allegations operate not merely as interpersonal disputes but as mechanisms of discipline and social regulation. Participants described how such allegations often arise following relational conflict, emotional breakdown, or interpersonal tension, where the accusation functions as a means of exerting control or inflicting punishment. One participant stated that “*some women use rape allegations as a weapon to get back at men when relationships end badly*” (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). These accounts indicate that false allegations should be analysed not only as legal claims, but as social practices through which moral authority is mobilised within unequal power relations.

From a Foucauldian perspective, such allegations can be understood as technologies of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977). Disciplinary power operates not primarily through overt coercion, but through surveillance, judgment, and the internalisation of norms. In this context, the force of the allegation lies less in its legal outcome and more in its circulation as a socially credible truth. Once an accusation is made, the accused is subjected to suspicion, stigma, and reputational harm. These consequences function as disciplinary mechanisms that regulate conduct by producing fear of exposure and moral condemnation, even in the absence of formal legal sanction (Foucault, 1980).

However, this disciplinary process does not affect all subjects equally. Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality provides a critical lens for understanding how race and gender shape the credibility and consequences of false allegations. Participants consistently reported that Black men are more readily presumed guilty when accused of rape, often in direct contradiction to the legal principle of presumed innocence. This pattern reflects the operation of what can be conceptualised as a racialised discursive regime which is a system of socially produced meanings and knowledge that determines whose voices are believed and whose are marginalised.

This discursive regime is deeply rooted in South Africa's colonial history. Colonial systems constructed Black men as hypersexual, dangerous, and morally suspect, a set of representations that continues to shape contemporary social understandings (Fanon, 1967; Gqola, 2015; Ratele, 2014). Within what Foucault (1980) terms a regime of truth, these historical narratives function as pre-existing frameworks through which accusations are interpreted. As a result, allegations against Black men are often treated as inherently plausible, while denials are received with skepticism. Importantly, the power of the allegation does not stem from the accuser's intent, but from the structural conditions that render the Black male body already suspect within the social imagination (Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

These racialised discursive processes have direct implications for the construction of masculinity. Drawing on Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity, South African society can be understood as organised around a hierarchical gender order that privileges White, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity as the normative ideal. Black

masculinities are positioned as subordinate within this hierarchy, frequently associated with deviance, instability, and threat. False rape allegations operate within this structure by denying Black men access to socially recognised forms of respectable masculinity. Rather than being afforded the possibility of moral credibility or social rehabilitation, the accused Black man is positioned as permanently suspect.

In this way, false allegations do not simply discipline individual bodies; they reproduce broader racial and gender hierarchies. The allegation activates long-standing stereotypes of Black male sexual danger, reinforcing what Fanon (1967) describes as the construction of the Black male body as pre-social and perpetually criminal. Through this process, Whiteness is secured as morally credible, while Black masculinity is continually positioned as deviant and disposable. The operation of power here is therefore both disciplinary and productive, shaping not only behaviour but also social identities (Foucault, 1977; 1978).

In interpreting these findings, it becomes clear that the falsely accused Black man occupies what Anzaldúa (1987: 3) describes as a *nepantla*, or an in-between state. He exists between a post-apartheid legal system that formally promises equality and a colonial history that continues to associate Black masculinity with danger and criminality. This condition is not an isolated experience but reflects what Wynter (2003: 260) refers to as the colonality of being, where certain groups continue to be viewed and treated as less fully human within dominant social structures.

The findings of this study should therefore not be understood as a generalization about all cases in South Africa. Rather, they provide a context-specific analysis of how anti-Blackness continues to shape social experiences and institutional practices within the Gauteng context (Sharpe 2016: 104). By centering the lived experiences of participants, the study engages in what Mignolo (2009: 160) describes as epistemic disobedience by challenging dominant forms of knowledge that often ignore or marginalize Black perspectives. In doing so, the study contributes to a more complex understanding of how gendered and racialized power relations can operate against Black men within contemporary South African society.

Participants' narratives further illustrate how this hierarchy is experienced in everyday life. One respondent explained that when a White man is accused, people tend to wait for evidence, whereas when a Black man is accused, guilt is often assumed immediately (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). While such accounts represent perceptions rather than empirically verifiable outcomes, they remain analytically significant. They reveal how racialised discourses structure everyday understandings of credibility, innocence, and guilt, and how these understandings shape lived experience.

The effects of this system extend beyond the moment of accusation to everyday conduct. Many participants described how Black men modify their behaviour in public spaces and in interactions with women in order to avoid suspicion. This reflects Foucault's (1978) concept of governmentality, whereby individuals come to regulate their own behaviour in response to anticipated surveillance. In this context, the social gaze operates as a diffuse form of monitoring that encourages self-discipline. Black

men restrict their movements, speech, and social interactions not because they are formally policed, but because they anticipate being judged through racialised frameworks of suspicion. Power thus operates through internalised regulation rather than direct force.

This demonstrates that false rape allegations operate within a racialised discursive regime shaped by disciplinary power, colonial histories, and gender hierarchies. While the preceding analysis has focused on how these structures function at the level of discourse, power, and identity formation, their effects are not abstract. Rather, they materialise in concrete social consequences that shape everyday life. One of the most significant ways in which this structural denial of legitimacy is experienced is through stigma. The following section therefore examines stigma as a central outcome of false rape allegations, analysing how it operates as a form of social punishment that extends beyond legal processes to affect reputation, employability, and long-term social inclusion.

5.2.1 *Stigma and Consequences*

The structural denial of legitimacy produces a tangible and enduring form of stigma, which emerged as one of the most painful consequences experienced by Black men falsely accused of rape in South Africa. Across the findings, participants reported that an accusation permanently damages a man's social standing. Many described it as a mark that follows them throughout their lives. As one respondent explained, "False allegations damage a man's name forever; you are never seen the same again" (Male,

25–34, Soweto). Another added, “Even after being cleared, no one will hire you; your name is already destroyed” (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg). Unrefined, these accounts show how stigma operates not only as a form of social punishment but also as a mechanism that reinforces the normative ideals of Hegemonic Masculinity.

In this regard, Goffman’s (1963) notion of spoiled identity clarifies how stigma collapses the distinction between accusation and guilt. At the same time, Foucault’s (1980) concept of regimes of truth explains how societies often determine credibility long before any evidence is established. Participants’ accounts consistently indicated that once accused, a Black man becomes socially defined by the allegation rather than by the actual outcome. Furthermore, drawing on Fanon (1963), the data reveal that the Black male body carries a historically produced and racialised mark of suspicion. Under colonial rule, Black men were constructed as dangerous and hypersexual, and in the present, these tropes continue to shape how rape accusations are interpreted. Consequently, stigma functions not only at the individual level but also within a broader racialised discursive regime that positions Black men as already guilty.

In addition to reputational harm, several participants described deep social exclusion as a direct consequence of the accusation. Respondents reported losing family support, friendships, and community standing. As one female participant explained, “People stop greeting you; they whisper when you pass. You become the example parents use to warn their sons” (Female, 26–30, Pretoria). These experiences resonate with Mbembe’s (2001) concept of social death, whereby individuals are socially erased despite being physically present. They also echo Ratele’s (2014) argument that Black masculinities in

South Africa remain under constant moral surveillance and racial scrutiny. In this context, the accused man becomes a symbolic cautionary figure, sustaining what Foucault (1977) terms the disciplinary gaze.

Beyond social exclusion, participants reported significant economic and psychological consequences. Many spoke about losing employment opportunities, community respect, and emotional stability. As one respondent stated, “Depression is real. You start doubting yourself even when you know you did not do it” (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg). This aligns with Mbembe’s (2003) account of necropolitics, which argues that systems of power diminish life by controlling whose wellbeing is allowed to flourish. Similarly, studies by Grounds (2004) and Dandurand (2021) show that false rape accusations often result in long-term anxiety, shame, and difficulty reintegrating into society. In the South African context, where unemployment and structural inequality remain high, stigma becomes a form of economic punishment that further entrenches racialised disadvantage.

Another critical concern raised by participants was the lack of accountability for individuals who make false allegations. Many interpreted this as evidence that the justice system protects accusers more than the accused. One respondent remarked, “If a woman lies, why is she not charged? We lose everything, but nothing happens to her” (Male, 18–25, Johannesburg). This perception reflects Foucault’s (1977) argument that power operates through selective punishment and unequal surveillance. Here, discipline is enacted not only through legal processes but also through rumour, gossip, and

institutional silence. As a result, the accused man is punished by social memory and by a racialised regime of truth that continues to cast him as a suspect.

Across interpersonal, social, institutional, and legal domains, the data expose a landscape in which Black men must continually perform their innocence in order to survive. For many, this produced a profound mistrust of society and state institutions. One respondent summarised this sentiment: “Even when you are cleared, people still look at you like you did something” (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg). This persistent suspicion mirrors Mbembe’s (2001) understanding of the afterlife of colonial domination, where control operates through discourse and moral judgment rather than overt coercion. In parallel, Mignolo’s (2007) concept of epistemic hierarchies helps explain how credibility is unevenly assigned along racial and gendered lines. Within this hierarchy, the accusation becomes a colonial signifier that shapes who can be believed. Consequently, stigma functions as part of the colonial matrix of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013), situating Black men within what Fanon (1963) calls the zone of non-being; present, yet perpetually doubted.

Ultimately, stigma emerges not merely as prejudice but as a continuation of colonial power, where reputations are destroyed through discourse, silence, and selective forms of belief. This broader theoretical understanding shows that the consequences of false rape allegations cannot be separated from the wider structures of race, power, gender and inequality in South Africa. The following section therefore examines the causes of false rape allegations, exploring how personal, relational, and structural factors contribute to their formation within this racialised and gendered social context.

5.3 CREDIBILITY, AGENCY, AND THE SELECTIVE ECONOMY OF BELIEF

This section shifts the analysis from stigma and disciplinary mechanisms to the economy of credibility itself. In doing so, it examines how the findings reveal the interplay between personal motives, structural constraints, and the racialised hierarchy of belief that shapes the perceived causes of false rape allegations. Participants commonly described such allegations as emerging from power struggles, emotional conflict, and material desperation, rather than isolated acts of deceit. Taken together, these explanations show how gender, race, and class intersect to shape both the motives and meanings of accusation, ensuring that allegations are rarely divorced from their wider structural context.

To begin with, revenge and retaliation were the most frequently cited causes. Many respondents viewed allegations as tools used to punish men after conflict or to regain control within intimate relationships. As one participant noted, “Some women use rape allegations as a weapon to get back at men when relationships end badly” (Male, 25–34, Johannesburg). This aligns with studies that identify revenge as a recurring motive (Kanin, 1994; Lisak et al., 2010; Rumney, 2013). Within the South African context, however, these dynamics are intensified by persistent gender inequalities and colonial legacies of mistrust. Foucault (1977) reminds us that power circulates through everyday relationships and that accusation itself can function as a disciplinary act. Consequently, when deployed in moments of emotional rupture, allegations become a means of asserting moral authority and social control.

In addition, financial or legal gain featured prominently as a perceived motive. More than half of respondents linked false reporting to securing maintenance, compensation, or advantage in custody or inheritance disputes. “Families sometimes use allegations to get money or to win in court,” explained one participant (Female, 35–44, Gauteng). This mirrors research demonstrating that economic precarity can drive false allegations (McNamara, 2020; Dandurand, 2021). In conditions of poverty and unemployment, accusations may function not solely as malicious acts but as survival strategies, what hooks (2004) describes as expressions of constrained agency. Thus, the findings expose the blurred line between resistance, retaliation, and tactical navigation of structural inequality.

At the same time, it is key to account for the accuser’s agency without detaching it from structural context. Spivak’s (1988) notion of Epistemic Violence reminds us that women themselves operate within systems that marginalise their voices and limit their options. Some female respondents acknowledged that allegations sometimes arose from fear, emotional distress, or interpersonal conflict. Therefore, false accusations cannot be reduced to simple deceit; instead, they must be understood within broader dynamics of patriarchal oppression, economic precarity, affective insecurity, and emotional survival.

This interpretation is consistent with Decolonial feminist insights (Lugones, 2010; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2015), which highlight how women’s agency is often shaped or distorted through structures of domination. Accordingly, false allegations should not be seen merely as acts of vengeance or miscommunication. Rather, they reveal how the racialised discursive regime is mobilised: women may unintentionally reproduce colonial

and patriarchal narratives that frame Black men as dangerous or animalistic. In turn, although women may be pursuing agency or retribution, the broader system benefits by reinforcing the subordinate and suspect status of Black masculinity.

Avoidance of shame and social pressure also emerged as significant motives. Some participants argued that women may claim rape to conceal consensual encounters from families or partners, particularly in conservative or religious contexts. One respondent explained, “She says it was rape, so her parents do not see her as loose” (Male, 18–24, Pretoria). This pattern mirrors evidence that stigma surrounding female sexuality often drives allegations aimed at protecting personal or family honour (Rumney, 2013; Dandurand, 2021). Here, Crenshaw’s (1991) concept of intersectionality clarifies how women’s behaviour is shaped by overlapping systems of gender, culture, and class that restrict sexual autonomy and expose women to moral judgment.

A smaller group of participants cited miscommunication, misinterpretation of consent, and emotional misunderstandings as contributing factors. These narratives illustrate how unequal gender expectations and patriarchal norms can transform interpersonal conflict into moral accusation. Ratele (2017) argues that African masculinities are often lived within constrained emotional frameworks that discourage vulnerability; as a result, conflict may escalate through accusation rather than dialogue.

From a Decolonial perspective, Mignolo (2007) and Mbembe (2001) explain how colonial hierarchies of knowledge continue to determine who is believed and who is doubted. Within this epistemic order, credibility is both racialised and gendered.

Women's voices are often culturally coded as moral and truthful, yet this credibility is conditional; it is most effective when women's accounts reinforce existing power relations. For this reason, when a Black woman accuses a Black man, her claim aligns with the colonial trope of the "dangerous Black male body" detailed by Fanon (1963) and Gqola (2015) and is thus readily believed. Conversely, when a Black woman accuses a White man, her credibility is undermined, and she may be portrayed as promiscuous, vindictive, or confused.

This contradiction reveals what Crenshaw (1991) calls the intersectional vulnerability of Black women where they are hyper-visible as moral witnesses yet invisible as legitimate victims. Spivak (1988) similarly argues that within colonial discourse, the subaltern woman "cannot speak" in ways that disrupt dominant hierarchies; her voice is amplified only when it sustains existing structures. Thus, colonial epistemologies produce a selective economy of belief that circulates truths that reinforce power while silencing those that challenge it.

Combined, these dynamics show that Hegemonic Masculinity functions as an unspoken benchmark of credibility within the justice system. False rape allegations, therefore, become acts of social emasculation, stripping the accused of the economic and social markers aligned with dominant masculine ideals. By systematically criminalising and stigmatising an already marginalised form of Black masculinity, the system secures the boundaries of the hegemonic type. In this sense, the judgment passed is not merely moral but a strategic reinforcement of the racialised and gendered power order.

5.3.1 *Mental Health and the Regulation of Credibility*

This complexity means that mental instabilities are often entangled with power structures. Foucault's (1961; 1980) work on madness shows how societies classify and regulate mental instability through disciplinary institutions, determining whose voice counts as rational. In this view, both accusers and accused become subjects of regulation. A woman whose account is inconsistent may be labelled "unstable" or "hysterical," reflecting patriarchal medicalisation of female emotion (Showalter, 1987). Similarly, a Black man's distress, whether anger, fear, or confusion, may be interpreted as aggression rather than vulnerability, positioning him within a regime that polices emotional expression and uses mental instability as a criterion for credibility.

Connell's (2005) Hegemonic Masculinity theory complements Foucault by showing how emotional expression is unevenly judged across racialised masculinities. As mentioned, several times before, Black men occupy a subordinated masculinity marked by stereotypes of hypersexuality and volatility (Fanon, 1963; Gqola, 2015). Thus, when Black men display trauma, depression, or fear during allegations, these emotions are often read as dangerousness rather than suffering. In this way, mental distress becomes pathologised, reinforcing racialised fears of Black male violence. Crenshaw's (1991) Intersectionality is very useful here as it further highlights how mental health, gender, and race intersect to shape whose distress is taken seriously: White women's emotional confusion may be treated with sympathy, while Black women's is dismissed as manipulation, and Black men's is framed as instability or threat.

Mbembe's (2001; 2003) necropolitics sharpens this analysis by showing how the label of "madness" can function as a political tool that produces social death. For the accuser, distress may be reduced to psychological fragility rather than recognised as relational conflict, while for the accused, being framed as unstable produces exclusion, unemployment, and reputational destruction. Mental illness becomes not just a clinical descriptor but a mechanism that regulates whose truth is permitted to stand and whose is silenced. This shows that mental health, far from being a private or a political matter, is a racialised and gendered category embedded in the colonial matrix of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Within this context, the coloniality of being becomes visible. Institutions such as the police, courts, and media act as epistemic gatekeepers, determining which expressions of memory, trauma, or confusion are deemed rational. As one participant explained, "Once they say you are angry or unstable, no one listens to what really happened" (Male, 30–39, Pretoria). His experience reflects a broader pattern where Black men's suffering is rendered unintelligible, while others' emotional struggles are medicalised, protected, or believed. Mental illness, therefore, operates as a discursive regime that shapes who is trusted, who is dismissed, and who must defend their sanity.

5.3.2 Healing and Spiritual Interventions

While participants did not explicitly discuss indigenous responses to psychological distress following false rape allegations against Black men, South African scholarship consistently shows that mental and spiritual well-being is often addressed through both

Western mental health services and indigenous healing systems. Studies on African Indigenous Religions indicate that emotional imbalance, misfortune, or forms of social contamination, such as being accused of wrongdoing, may require ritual cleansing, consultation with diviners (izangoma/izinyanga), or other spiritual interventions aimed at removing “bad luck,” “imposed shame,” or symbolic pollution (Mokgobi, 2014; Nkomo & Maluleke, 2020). Given this context, it is reasonable to suggest that some Black men falsely accused of rape may draw on both psychiatric care and indigenous healing frameworks to cope with trauma. In this way, the findings point to a multifaceted landscape of healing in South Africa, where Western and indigenous modalities often operate in parallel or intersect.

At the same time, mental health and unintentional allegations reveal how power operates across psychological, social, cultural, and structural levels to determine whose narratives are recognised as legitimate. Foucault (1980) explains how mental distress becomes a site of regulation; Connell (1995) demonstrates how gendered hierarchies shape emotional credibility; Crenshaw (1991) shows how intersectional inequalities influence whose distress is validated; and Mbembe (2001) exposes how accusations and “madness” can produce forms of social death. Collectively, these insights demonstrate that mental instability is not simply an individual condition. Rather, it is a politically charged category that regulates truth, identity, and survival within the broader colonial matrix of power.

Although the causes of false rape allegations reveal the interpersonal and emotional dynamics that contribute to their emergence, they do not fully explain how Black men

navigate the aftermath of being falsely accused. Once a man enters the border space created by suspicion, he must negotiate powerful systems that position him as deviant. It is within this contested space that questions of agency, resistance, and reclaiming voice become central. Accordingly, the following section examines how falsely accused Black men resist these overlapping forms of power and work to rebuild their identities within the racialised and gendered structures that attempt to silence them.

5.4 RESISTANCE AND RECLAIMING VOICE

This section addresses Objective 3 of the study: to examine the psychosocial impacts of false rape accusations on Black men and the strategies they use to cope and resist. The men's accounts show that resistance is not limited to overt confrontation; rather, it is embedded in subtle acts of reclaiming dignity, reshaping identity, and challenging the discursive systems that attempt to fix them into the identity of "rapist." At the same time, resistance does not emerge from a single location. Instead, it arises at the intersection of disciplinary power (Foucault), hegemonic masculinity (Connell), African masculinities (Ratele), and decolonial thought (Mignolo; Anzaldúa; Fanon). Accordingly, resistance must be understood through an integrated, multi-level perspective. This multi-lens approach highlights the diverse forms resistance can take and provides deeper insight into how Black men reclaim voice within the racialised and gendered border space they are forced to occupy.

Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power provides the first analytical entry point. Once accused, the Black male body becomes subjected to heightened surveillance, judgment, and reputational control. Nevertheless, resistance emerges through what

Foucault (1982) calls “technologies of the self”: practices individuals use to reconstruct their identities despite the regulatory gaze. Several men described purposeful acts of self-reclamation, including rebuilding their public reputations, mentoring younger men, or engaging in faith communities. One participant explained, “They killed my name, but I chose to rebuild it through truth” (Male, 40–49, Pretoria). These testimonies therefore demonstrate that the accused are not passive recipients of disciplinary power; rather, they position themselves as active subjects who challenge and renegotiate the truth claims imposed upon them.

However, Foucault alone does not explain why the burden of suspicion falls disproportionately on Black men. In this regard, Connell’s (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity highlights a crucial tension. Hegemonic masculinity relies on hierarchies that elevate certain masculine identities, white, heterosexual, middle-class, while subordinating others. Within this hierarchy, the findings show that Black men are more readily labelled dangerous and hypersexual, and thus become especially vulnerable to accusation. As one participant explained, “For people, it’s easier to believe a Black man did it; they don’t wait for evidence” (Male, 25–34, Pretoria). This dynamic illustrates how disciplinary power becomes grafted onto gendered and racial hierarchies, producing a compounded form of marginalisation.

At the same time, resistance also involves refusing the inferior masculinity imposed upon Black men. Several participants articulated new forms of ethical, reflective, and relational manhood that align with Ratele’s (2017) African masculinities, which emphasise care, vulnerability, and communal responsibility rather than dominance. As

one respondent reflected, “This experience broke me, but it taught me to be gentle, to listen, and to guide others” (Male, 35–44, Johannesburg). These accounts suggest that resistance entails redefining masculinity within alternative cultural and ethical frameworks.

Furthermore, decolonial thought deepens the analysis by framing this struggle as an epistemic one. Anzaldúa’s (1987) notion of the borderlands and Mignolo’s (2011) concept of border thinking describe how marginalised subjects generate knowledge from positions of contradiction and exclusion. The falsely accused Black man occupies precisely such a border zone, cast socially as guilty while knowing himself to be innocent. This very position creates what Mignolo (2007) terms an epistemic fracture, where dominant systems of knowledge are contested by the lived experiences of those they attempt to define. Speaking out, mentoring others, and participating in community work become forms of what Mignolo calls “epistemic disobedience,” through which men challenge colonial and Eurocentric narratives that equate Black masculinity with danger. As one participant noted, “If I remain silent, the story they told about me wins. Speaking is how I take myself back” (Male, 30–39, Pretoria).

This decolonial reading also intersects with Fanon’s (1967) analysis of Black existence in the zone of non-being. Fanon argues that the Black subject is often reduced to an inferior ontological status, treated more as an object of fear than as a full human being. The men in this study described similar experiences of social erasure and moral disqualification, even after legal vindication. Nonetheless, Fanon also insists that reclaiming one’s voice is an act of re-humanisation. Through this lens, the teaching,

rebuilding, and public speaking described by participants can be understood as Fanonian strategies of reclaiming *being*, the efforts to restore humanity in a world that renders them suspect.

Taken in combination, these different theoretical lenses reveal several key tensions. Foucault explains how individuals are regulated, while decolonial theory explains why Black men in particular become targets of suspicion. Connell highlights the gendered dimension of their marginalisation, while Ratele shows that African masculinities contain resources for resistance that Eurocentric models overlook. Simultaneously, Foucault emphasises individual acts of resistance, whereas Fanon and Mignolo foreground voice as an epistemic and political practice that challenges colonial hierarchies. Rather than contradictions, these perspectives create productive intersections that expose the multi-layered nature of resistance.

Ultimately, the study's testimonies and theoretical insights show that reclaiming voice is both a personal and structural struggle. It requires resisting the disciplinary power that seeks to silence, challenging the racialised and gendered hierarchies that frame Black men as inherently guilty, and producing alternative knowledge from the border space of exclusion. In this sense, resistance is not merely emotional healing or individual coping; it is a profound contestation of the colonality of truth. Through speaking, mentoring, rebuilding, and refusing imposed identities, falsely accused Black men transform the border space from a site of injury into a site of agency. Their acts expose and disrupt the racialised regimes of truth that determine whose voices matter and whose innocence must continually be proven.

5.5 INSTITUTIONAL AND MEDIA POWER IN SHAPING NARRATIVES

This section analyses the role of institutional and media structures as epistemic gatekeepers that actively produce and enforce racialised narratives of guilt against falsely accused Black men. Beyond personal motives or community pressures, many participants pointed to the powerful role of institutions such as the police, courts, and media in shaping how false rape allegations are understood and believed, especially those labelled against Black men. As shown in Chapter 4, the data revealed a consistent pattern: once an accusation gains institutional visibility, it becomes treated as fact long before any legal verdict is reached. Several respondents described feeling that the accusation itself becomes guilt once validated by authority or amplified by the media. One participant (aged 35–44, Johannesburg, 2024) explained, “Once the story is on Facebook or the news, you are already guilty. Even if the case is dropped, no one reads that part.”

Seen through what Foucault (1977) terms the theatre of power, false rape allegations unfold within a public arena where multiple actors (society, women, Black men, the police, the justice system, government, and the media) perform predetermined roles. In this theatre, accusation becomes a script, institutions become the stage, and the public becomes the audience invited to judge before evidence is even presented. The police perform authority through arrests and statements, the media perform truth through selective reporting, and society performs moral outrage based on racialised and gendered expectations. Within this staged performance, the Black man is cast into the role of the dangerous perpetrator a role historically scripted for him through colonial

fears and Apartheid-era narratives. This public choreography transforms suspicion into certainty, and visibility into guilt, long before any legal process occurs.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, quantitative findings also supported this trend: 68% of respondents agreed that “the media and police make false allegations appear true,” while 72% reported losing friends, jobs, or reputations before any court process concluded. These responses show that institutional and media power give social force to accusations, shaping public opinion and determining credibility even before evidence is examined.

Moreover, Foucault’s (1977) concept of power/knowledge provides a critical framework for understanding this phenomenon. Institutions such as the police, courts, and media do not merely document events; they produce what society recognises as truth. Through official reports, press statements, and courtroom language, they construct knowledge about “who did what” within pre-existing hierarchies of race, gender, and morality. In this context, the falsely accused Black man becomes a disciplined subject, watched, recorded, and judged through mechanisms that define him as deviant even before guilt is proven. The mere act of being accused transforms his identity within what Foucault (1977) calls the “carceral network,” where visibility equals control and innocence must struggle against institutionalised suspicion.

This aligns closely with Goffman’s (1963) theory of stigma, which explains how public labels mark individuals as “spoiled” or socially contaminated. Once a man is publicly accused, stigma becomes his new identity, visible, inescapable, and self-perpetuating.

Participants described how neighbours avoided them, employers terminated contracts, and families withdrew support. One respondent (aged 30–39, Pretoria) observed, “Even when you win the case, you have already lost your life.” This statement captures the enduring social consequences of institutional power: exoneration cannot undo the social death that accusation has already created.

Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics deepens this analysis by showing how power decides who remains socially alive and who becomes symbolically dead. Within the terrain of false rape allegations, institutions and media act as necropolitical agents. They possess the authority to “kill” reputations, silence dissenting voices, and erase livelihoods, all while claiming moral legitimacy. Once labelled a “rapist,” a man’s social existence collapses even before a legal outcome is reached. His body continues to live, but his social being is extinguished. This form of social death, through humiliation, unemployment, and exclusion, illustrates how modern systems of justice reproduce colonial forms of domination under new names.

Participants also criticised media sensationalism, describing it as both a cause and amplifier of injustice. Many respondents noted that false allegations circulated widely on social media and in local news outlets, whereas subsequent corrections or acquittals were rarely reported. One male participant (aged 25–34, Soweto, 2024) commented, “People believe the first version because it fits what they already think about us.” This reflects Gqola’s (2015) argument that South African rape discourse relies on racialised scripts of danger, where the Black male body remains the central symbol of sexual threat. In this sense, the media operates as an extension of colonial power, not

necessarily through intentional malice, but through the structural and unconscious recycling of historical fears of Black male sexuality under the guise of protecting women. This demonstrates how power perpetuates existing hierarchies independent of individual actors' intentions. Visibility, therefore, becomes a double-edged sword; it exposes injustice but also reproduces racialised surveillance.

From an Intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991), these dynamics reveal how race and gender intersect within institutional processes of truth-making. Drawing on Connell's (1995) theory of Hegemonic Masculinity and Mignolo's (2007) idea of epistemic hierarchies, it is evident that the voices of dominant masculinities (such as White or middle-class men) are positioned with a higher degree of initial credibility and are often afforded the 'benefit of the doubt'. This contrasts sharply with how the experiences of Black men are more easily dismissed. This racialised hierarchy of credibility reflects what Fanon (1963) called the "colonial gaze", which is a system that interprets the Black male body as always-already guilty, dangerous, and sexually excessive. Within this colonial logic, innocence must prove itself, while accusation needs no justification.

Seen through the lens of the colonality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), institutional and media power perpetuate a deeper ontological injustice. They not only judge actions but define being itself: who is human enough to be believed, and who exists only as an object of suspicion. When institutions endorse or broadcast an allegation without verification, they participate in the ongoing dehumanisation of Black existence. The accused man becomes a shadow in the social order; a body stripped of dignity,

credibility, and belonging. This is the modern face of coloniality which can be argued to be the continuation of racial hierarchies within systems that claim to be neutral.

Therefore, as previously mentioned several times throughout this study, false rape allegations cannot be viewed merely as private conflicts between the accuser and accused. They are public acts of power, sustained by institutional and media structures that produce, circulate, and legitimise selective truths. The police and courts lend official authority to accusation, the media magnifies it into social reality and together, they shape public consciousness around guilt, gender, and race. As a result, the burden of proof is reversed, and innocence becomes an exception while disbelief becomes the norm.

Recognising these dynamics shifts the conversation from individual blame to structural accountability. It highlights that justice in post-apartheid South Africa cannot be achieved without interrogating the institutional systems that reproduce colonial hierarchies of knowledge, visibility, and belief. As one participant (aged 28–34, Johannesburg, 2024) concluded, “We need justice not just in court, but in how stories are told.” This statement captures the essence of the participants’ message: until institutions and media are decolonised, until they learn to see and hear differently, truth will remain a privilege of power, and false allegations will continue to serve as instruments of social control rather than pathways to justice. Thus, until this is addressed, Black men remain empty vessels whose emptiness is beneficial to the status quo.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa are not random personal disputes, but phenomena deeply rooted in systems of power that govern truth, credibility, and justice. The findings reveal that accusation functions as a layered social weapon. At the personal level, it disciplines behaviour through fear and stigma, compelling men to adopt self-surveillance in line with Foucault's (1977) disciplinary power. At the social and institutional levels, it reproduces colonial hierarchies of gender and race, where the Black man remains hyper-visible yet unheard, often suffering symbolic death (Mbembe, 2001) via institutional and media amplification. Nevertheless, amid this oppression, the data revealed profound acts of resistance. Many falsely accused men actively engaged in re-humanisation through faith, mentorship, and advocacy. Their decision to speak, teach, and rebuild community represents acts of border thinking (Mignolo, 2011) and agency that challenge colonial narratives of Black masculinity as violent or broken, showing that healing and strength can coexist with vulnerability.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that false rape allegations must be understood as part of a broader colonial and patriarchal structure that governs belief, speech, and existence itself. By synthesising Foucault's power/knowledge, Connell's masculinities, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and Fanon's/Mbembe's decolonial thought, the analysis pinpoints the specific mechanisms through which institutions and media sustain a racialised regime of truth. The key implication is that justice cannot be achieved through individual exoneration alone; it demands a shift from moral judgment to structural accountability, which interrogates the systems that define credibility and humanity within

the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This foundational analysis establishes the urgent need for a new conceptual framework: the Coloniality of Accusations. As such, Chapter 6 will move from analysis to conceptual innovation, utilising this framework to explain how suspicion, surveillance, and moral control function as a continuation of historical power to shape who can speak, who is believed, and who must constantly prove their innocence in contemporary South Africa.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“To be accused is to enter a colonial theatre where innocence must prove itself before power. The script has not changed; only the actors have.”

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings together the central arguments of this study and shows how the findings presented in Chapters 4 and discussed in chapter 5 respond to the research aim, research objectives, and overarching question guiding the dissertation. Across the study, evidence consistently revealed that false rape allegations are not random interpersonal disputes but are shaped by the colonial matrix of power that continues to define credibility, danger, gender relations, and racialised suspicion in post-apartheid South Africa. Chapters 4 and 5 showed that Black men experience false rape allegations as a form of disciplinary power that regulates behaviour through fear, stigma, and the constant need to demonstrate innocence. These findings confirm that false rape allegations function as technologies of control that reproduce longstanding colonial narratives of Black male hypersexuality, aggression, and moral risk.

Together, the findings answered the main research question; *How do gendered and racialised power dynamics influence the causes, experiences, and consequences of false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa?* in different ways. The data demonstrated that these dynamics operate through three interconnected channels: (1) shifting gendered power dynamics and social tensions, (2) racialised stereotypes rooted in colonial histories, and (3) institutional and social practices that privilege certain voices

while casting doubt on others. In each instance, coloniality surfaced not as background context but as an active force shaping truth, suspicion, and belief.

For objectives, the first one which was exploring the causes of false allegations, was addressed in Chapter 4 through participants' descriptions of motives linked to relational conflict, revenge, fear, shame, protection of social reputation, and the inherited colonial scripts that frame Black men as always potentially guilty. Objective Two, examining community narratives regarding consequences for women who falsely accuse, was answered through data revealing the absence of accountability, the racialised politics of belief, and the social protection often extended to accusers under gendered and moral assumptions. Objective Three, understanding how false allegations shape the identities, behaviours, and everyday experiences of Black men, was fulfilled through findings showing heightened self-surveillance, social withdrawal, fear of intimacy, reputational harm, and internalised stigma. Finally, objective Four documenting the personal, psychological, and social effects of false allegations was achieved through participants' accounts of trauma, loss of employment, alienation, breakdown of relationships, and long-term emotional distress.

Put together, the findings affirm that the study's central aim, to understand how racialised and gendered power dynamics shape the causes, experiences, and consequences of false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa, was achieved to a greater extent. The syndissertation provided in this chapter moves beyond isolated findings to reveal the broader pattern, an accusation itself whether true or unfound, operates as a colonial mechanism of regulation. This insight led to the

development of the study's original contribution, *the Coloniality of Accusations*, a conceptual framework that captures how inherited colonial hierarchies of truth and credibility continue to govern the lives of Black men in democratic South Africa.

The next section offers a deeper conceptual reflection. It explores how theories such as *Intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991), *Hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 1995), and Foucault's ideas of *Biopower*, *Biopolitics*, and *Governmentality* (Foucault, 1977; 1991) help explain the power relations behind false rape allegations in South Africa. These Western theories are placed in dialogue with key decolonial perspectives, including necropolitics and image ontology (Mbembe, 2003; 2004), border thinking (Mignolo, 2011), pluriversality (Grosfoguel, 2013), and the coloniality of power and being (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This dialogue exposes the limits of Eurocentric frameworks and opens space for more inclusive and contextually grounded understandings of power and justice in postcolonial Africa. From this critical engagement emerges the study's original concept, the Coloniality of Accusations, which builds on these traditions to show how racialised and gendered power continues to shape truth and credibility in South Africa today.

6.2 CONCEPTUAL REFLECTION

This section brings together insights from Foucault, Connell, Crenshaw, and key decolonial thinkers such as Fanon, Mbembe, Mignolo, and Ndlovu-Gatsheni in order to explain how false rape allegations against Black men in South Africa function as colonial technologies of power. Although these scholars come from different intellectual traditions, they nevertheless share a concern with how systems of power shape truth,

morality, and identity (Foucault, 1977; Connell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1989; Fanon, 1967; Mbembe, 2001; Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). By placing their ideas in dialogue, and by drawing on the findings of this study, the analysis therefore develops a new concept, which I term the *Coloniality of Accusations*. This concept captures how colonial modes of control continue to shape who is believed, who is feared, and who must continually prove their innocence in post-apartheid society.

More specifically, Western theories of power and gender, such as those proposed by Foucault, Connell, and Crenshaw, reveal how control operates through social institutions, moral regulation, and intersecting hierarchies of identity (Foucault, 1977; Connell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1989). However, these theories often overlook the historical depth of colonialism and race, particularly in postcolonial contexts. By contrast, decolonial perspectives illuminate how colonial domination continues to define modern structures of knowledge, morality, and justice (Fanon, 1967; Mbembe, 2001; Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). When read together, these frameworks reveal that accusation itself, particularly when directed at Black men, is not a neutral or purely individual act. Rather, it functions as a moral and epistemic practice through which society reproduces racial and gender hierarchies while maintaining the illusion of justice.

The findings of this study suggest that false rape allegations against Black men in Gauteng should not be understood as isolated legal incidents, but rather as outcomes shaped by deeper historical and structural inequalities. The study demonstrates that Black men often experience a persistent condition of suspicion rooted in what Sharpe

(2016: 106) describes as the enduring realities of anti-Blackness. In this context, the credibility of accusations is frequently influenced by racial assumptions that position Black men as threats within society, reflecting what Mills (1997: 62) conceptualises as the racial contract. The findings further indicate that, despite the democratic transition in South Africa, aspects of the justice system and broader social attitudes continue to be shaped by colonial forms of knowledge and racialized gender norms that undermine the credibility and lived experiences of Black men (Wynter 2003: 270). Therefore, this section moves beyond description to propose a critical analytical lens, the *Coloniality of Accusations*, that makes visible how the colonial gaze, moral suspicion, and disciplinary power continue to regulate the lives of Black men in South Africa.

6.2.1 The Coloniality of Accusations

Drawing on Quijano's (2000) definition of coloniality as the enduring structures of power that outlive formal colonial rule, and building on Maldonado-Torres's (2007) argument that colonialism continues to shape who is considered credible or fully human, this study therefore defines the *Coloniality of Accusations* as the continuation of colonial power through the act of accusing. Specifically, it refers to the ways in which social, legal, and moral systems reproduce inherited racial hierarchies by determining whose claims or accusations are trusted and whose innocence requires constant demonstration. In this sense, accusation is recognised as a tool through which the performance and practice of colonial discourses of danger, deviance, and suspicion continue to govern the lives of Black men in post-apartheid South Africa.

At a broader level, the *Coloniality of Accusations* emerges from recognising that truth, justice, and belief in South Africa remain shaped by colonial hierarchies of value. Although the country achieved political independence, social and moral systems nevertheless continue to privilege certain voices while systematically distrusting others. Within this context, accusation itself becomes a form of power; that is, a mechanism that disciplines and silences, particularly when directed at Black men.

In this regard, Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power helps to explain how control operates through fear, visibility, and self-surveillance rather than through physical punishment. However, his framework largely ignores the role of race and colonial history in shaping who becomes the primary target of such control. Extending Foucault's analysis, the *Coloniality of Accusations* argues that, in post-apartheid South Africa, the constant fear of being accused functions as a form of moral surveillance. As a result, Black men are encouraged to monitor their behaviour, remain cautious, and internalise social suspicion. In this way, accusation operates as a disciplinary tool that sustains social order through fear and self-restraint.

Similarly, Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity further clarifies this process by demonstrating how patriarchy ranks and legitimises different forms of masculinity. While, her model does not fully address how racial history shapes these hierarchies. Within the framework of the *Coloniality of Accusations*, Black men occupy a contradictory position: on the one hand, they are expected to embody masculine strength and responsibility; on the other hand, they are simultaneously treated as morally suspect. This double bind reveals how racialised masculinity continues to be

regulated through inherited colonial scripts that mark Black men as dangerous or deviant.

In addition, Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality adds another analytical layer by demonstrating how race, gender, and class intersect to produce overlapping forms of inequality. However, intersectionality often focuses on lived intersections rather than on their historical origins. The *Coloniality of Accusations* extends this perspective by tracing these inequalities back to colonial power structures that continue to determine whose truth matters. From this viewpoint, accusation is shaped not only by identity but also by long-standing systems that define credibility itself.

Furthermore, decolonial scholars such as Fanon (1963, 1967), Mbembe (2001, 2003), Mignolo (2007), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) deepen this analysis by showing how colonial power persists through the coloniality of being, power, and knowledge. For example, Fanon's notion of the racialised gaze illustrates how the Black body is never perceived neutrally but is instead continually read through suspicion. Building on this insight, the *Coloniality of Accusations* suggests that accusation itself operates as a gaze; that is, a social act that transforms visibility into moral risk. Similarly, Mbembe's (2001, 2003), concept of *commandement* demonstrates how authority is maintained through moral regulation rather than overt force, while Mignolo's (2007) notion of epistemic disobedience reveals how colonial systems continue to determine whose voices are recognised as credible.

When viewed through the same lenses, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that accusation functions as a moral and epistemic practice that reproduces colonial power in postcolonial states, like South Africa. Every accusation, in effect, establishes a particular version of “truth” by granting belief to one voice while discrediting another. The *Coloniality of Accusations* therefore exposes how accusation operates as both a social and political act that governs life through fear, stigma, and silence.

By naming this process, the concept contributes to decolonial thought and gender scholarship by offering a new analytical framework for understanding how racialised and gendered hierarchies persist within democratic societies. Ultimately, it invites a rethinking of justice, not as a neutral process of truth-finding, but as a deeply political space in which belief, credibility, and morality remain shaped by the unfinished legacy of colonial power practices.

6.2.2 *From Theory to Lived Reality*

The conceptual reflections above become clearer when read alongside the lived realities shared by participants. Their perceptions and experiences reveal how the colonial script of suspicion continues to shape everyday life in South Africa. Although the context has changed, the logic remains the same, Black men’s identities are constantly negotiated through fear, moral judgment, and social control.

As participants described, being accused, even falsely, carries an enduring mark of shame. Families withdraw, communities whisper, and employers hesitate. These social reactions mirror Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power, where individuals regulate

themselves under the threat of judgment. Yet in this context, the disciplinary gaze is racialised. It operates not through the state alone but through neighbours, colleagues, and digital spaces that circulate suspicion. The colonial gaze has simply changed its form, from overt racial surveillance to everyday moral policing.

Participants' stories also reflect how intersecting inequalities intensify this burden. Many of the men who shared their experiences came from working-class or township backgrounds, where accusations spread faster and support systems are weaker. Their voices expose how class and race combine to determine credibility. This mirrors Crenshaw's intersectional insight, but with a distinctly colonial trace, the assumption that poverty and Blackness signify guilt.

At the same time, several participants expressed a quiet defiance, strategies of self-protection such as avoiding certain social situations, recording conversations, or retreating from relationships. These responses demonstrate what Mbembe (2001) calls the "*afterlife of commandement*," where colonial power endures through moral fear rather than physical coercion. The accused become self-disciplined subjects, constantly performing innocence in order to survive social suspicion.

Combined, these experiences affirm that the *Coloniality of Accusations* is not an abstract concept but a *lived* condition. It manifests in reputational damage, emotional isolation, and the cautious self-governance of men who live under the shadow of potential blame. Their narratives confirm that the colonial order of belief and credibility did not disappear, rather it evolved into subtler forms of social control embedded in

modern life. This connection between theory and experience underscores the need to re-imagine justice beyond the courtroom, toward spaces that recognise how historical power continues to define whose truth is heard.

6.2.3 Surveillance, Power, and Black Masculinities

Building on the idea of the *Coloniality of Accusations*, this section shows how surveillance operates as a form of social control that shapes the lives of Black men in South Africa. Surveillance here does not mean state monitoring or cameras; it refers to the moral and social observation that makes people regulate themselves because they fear judgment or accusation.

Moral Control and Self-Monitoring

Participants in this study described living under a sense of constant visibility, the feeling that their words, movements, and interactions could be misunderstood or turned against them. Many avoided social gatherings or limited contact with women to prevent misinterpretation. This behaviour reflects how power operates quietly, not through force, but through internal pressure to appear cautious and respectable. The fear of accusation becomes a tool of discipline, encouraging silence and self-surveillance.

Masculinity Under Suspicion

These experiences also expose the contradictions of being a man in a society where masculinity is both demanded and distrusted. Black men are expected to show

confidence, control, and responsibility, yet these same traits can be misread as aggression or threat. The result is a constant balancing act, performing strength while trying to appear harmless. Participants' stories reveal how this pressure produces exhaustion and anxiety, showing that surveillance does not only control behaviour but also emotions and identity.

The Racialised Gaze in Everyday Life

Although political apartheid has ended, the moral gaze that once defined Black men as dangerous continues to shape social judgment. Participants described how neighbours, colleagues, and even strangers monitor their behaviour, especially in interactions with women. Online spaces add to this visibility, where rumours and public opinion spread rapidly. Being seen no longer guarantees recognition, it exposes one to moral risk. The colonial gaze has become digital and communal, surviving in new forms that keep old suspicions alive.

Living With Uncertainty

For the falsely accused, everyday life becomes a space of moral uncertainty. Many described a sense of never being fully innocent, always needing to explain themselves or prove good character. This insecurity limits social freedom and damages self-worth. Surveillance, in this sense, is not only something done to them, it becomes part of how they see themselves. It turns ordinary life into a performance of caution and compliance.

The next section expands this discussion by examining how these everyday experiences of visibility and control are rooted in the deeper colonial history of racialised subjectivity that continues to shape belief and credibility in post-apartheid South Africa.

6.2.4 Subjectivities and Coloniality

Enduring Colonial Logics

The findings of this study show that many participants felt they were treated as guilty or untrustworthy even before being heard. This everyday experience reflects the survival of colonial hierarchies in modern moral life. As Mbembe (2001) describes in his idea of the *afterlife of commandement*, colonial authority now operates through moral judgment rather than open coercion. In this way, accusation becomes a form of coloniality of power, it disciplines through fear and stigma rather than physical force. For Black men, to be visible is not to be free; it is to risk being misread, exposed, and condemned. This dynamic is clearly captured by Davis in *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle* (2016), where she argues that freedom is never a settled condition but an ongoing contest against systems of suspicion and domination that continually reproduce inequality under the guise of moral order.

Living Under Racial Suspicion

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) explains this condition as the *coloniality of being*, the way colonialism continues to shape who is recognised as fully human. For the falsely accused Black man, this means living with constant uncertainty, always having to prove

integrity and decency in a society that still views his body as a site of potential danger. Several participants described changing how they spoke, dressed, or interacted to avoid drawing suspicion. This self-adjustment mirrors Fanon's (1967) idea of the *epidermalisation of inferiority*, where racial stigma becomes internalised. Even when no one is directly accused, the legacy of suspicion remains active in the mind, shaping how one behaves and how one is perceived. As Biko (1978, p. 98), in *I Write What I Like* powerfully asserts, "In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible, a more human face", a vision that frames justice as a fundamentally humanising project.

6.3 Credibility and Knowledge Control

Colonial control also persists through the production of knowledge, through deciding whose words carry weight and whose do not. Mignolo (2007) calls this *epistemic disobedience*, the refusal to accept the colonial hierarchy of credibility. Within the context of false rape allegations, the hierarchy remains: the voice of the accuser often holds more authority than the defence of the accused, especially when the accused is a Black man. Truth, therefore, is not decided by evidence alone but by racialised moral assumptions that continue to shape who is believable. To accuse is to speak from a socially protected position, while to defend is to speak from one already marked by disbelief.

The Colonised Imagination

These dynamics reflect what Mbembe (2017) calls the *colonised imagination*, which he defines as a way of thinking that keeps old hierarchies alive under democratic conditions. Even when innocence is proven, the accusation leaves a lasting moral mark. Many participants said that being cleared of charges did not restore their dignity or public standing. Suspicion lingers as a form of social memory that follows them into workplaces, relationships, and community life. In this sense, the accusation itself becomes a social sentence.

The *Coloniality of Accusations* therefore reveals that false rape allegations lie at the intersection of three dimensions of colonial power: power, being, and knowledge, where *power* operates through social surveillance and control, *being* is shaped by racial suspicion and moral doubt, and *knowledge* determines whose voice is considered credible. Together, these forces create a system where accusation is not just a legal act but a way of defining existence, deciding whose life and truth are recognised as human, and whose are reduced to suspicion.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the epistemic disobedience adopted in this study, several recommendations are proposed to challenge the colonial power structures that continue to shape the South African legal system. First, there is a need for training within the judiciary and law enforcement that goes beyond basic gender sensitivity and includes a deeper understanding of racialized power relations and the historical effects of what Mills (1997: 136) describes as racial contracts. Second, policy interventions should address the continued marginalization and silencing of Black male experiences by developing restorative justice frameworks that acknowledge the emotional, social, and psychological impact experienced by falsely accused individuals. These recommendations are intended to encourage a shift away from Eurocentric legal approaches that

continue to dominate GBV discourse in South Africa (Mignolo 2009: 175). Through such changes, the state can begin to challenge forms of knowledge and institutional practices that often render the experiences of Black men invisible within broader discussions of justice and accountability.

6.4.1 *Towards a Decolonial Understanding of Justice*

This chapter shows that false rape allegations against Black men cannot be understood only as isolated cases of injustice or gender conflict. They must be seen as part of a deeper colonial system that still shapes how society defines truth, credibility, and guilt. The concept of the *Coloniality of Accusations* helps to reveal this system by showing that accusation itself operates as a form of power. Recognising this dynamic is essential for developing a truly decolonial understanding of justice in South Africa.

Challenging the Illusion of Neutral Truth

A decolonial approach to justice challenges the idea of a single, universal truth. As Mignolo (2007) argues, modern systems of knowledge were built on colonial hierarchies that privileged certain worldviews while silencing others. In South Africa, these hierarchies still influence how accusations are interpreted and whose accounts are taken seriously. The disbelief often directed toward falsely accused Black men is not rooted in evidence but in enduring colonial associations of Blackness with danger, violence, and moral weakness (Fanon, 1963; Mbembe, 2001).

A decolonial vision therefore calls for pluriversality, the recognition of multiple ways of knowing and being. Instead of assuming that truth is singular or universal, pluriversality values diverse experiences and epistemologies that colonial systems historically dismissed. Through this lens, justice becomes not the imposition of one dominant truth but the coexistence of many, grounded in mutual recognition and dignity.

Decolonising the Social Order

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) reminds us that decolonising justice requires dismantling what he calls the *coloniality of being*, the social order that ranks some people as less human or less credible than others. The findings of this study confirm that even in democratic South Africa, this hierarchy still shapes public judgment. Accusation remains a moral tool of control that protects dominant moral authority while keeping racial hierarchies intact. Therefore, achieving decolonial justice involves more than reforming court procedures; it requires transforming how society itself defines truth, morality, and humanity.

Restoring Epistemic Justice

A vital part of this transformation involves promoting what Fricker (2007) calls *epistemic justice*, the right to be heard, believed, and taken seriously. Within the framework of the *Coloniality of Accusations*, disbelief toward Black men is not accidental but a structural outcome of colonial knowledge systems. A decolonial approach must therefore restore credibility to those whose voices have long been silenced or dismissed. Listening to the

experiences of falsely accused Black men is not only about empathy, but also an act of epistemic repair that challenges the inherited belief that Blackness equals guilt.

Recovering Humanity

Fanon (1967) argued that colonial systems stripped the colonised of their full humanity through control, suspicion, and humiliation. The *Coloniality of Accusations* shows that this denial continues today through subtle moral and social mechanisms that cast certain people as inherently untrustworthy. Justice, therefore, must mean more than legal fairness, it must mean the restoration of humanity. This includes recognising the deep historical roots of disbelief and dismantling them across law, media, and everyday social life.

Justice Beyond Division

This study also shows that addressing GBV and ensuring fairness for the falsely accused are not opposing goals. Both require confronting the colonial systems that distort truth and credibility. A justice system informed by decolonial thought would not only punish wrongdoing but also question the moral hierarchies that decide whose truth matters. Protecting women and defending falsely accused men both depend on a justice framework grounded in equality, accountability, and compassion.

The *Coloniality of Accusations* contributes to a decolonial understanding of justice by exposing how colonial histories continue to shape moral judgment and belief in South Africa. It challenges legal and social institutions to move beyond surface reforms and to confront the deeper colonial structures that still define truth. Decolonial justice, therefore, is not only about changing laws as it is about rehumanising those who have been historically doubted, misread, and silenced. It calls for a justice that is not only fair, but also conscious of history, guided by empathy, and grounded in the equal humanity of all. As Mignolo (2007) eloquently puts it, decolonial justice requires “*learning to unlearn in order to relearn*,” a process through which inherited colonial assumptions about truth, credibility, and humanity are critically undone and re-imagined.

6.4.2 POLICY, PRACTICE, AND THEORETICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study confirm that false rape allegations are imbedded in deeper historical, racial, and epistemic systems that continue to shape justice in South Africa. As already exposed, the *Coloniality of Accusations* highlights that accusation itself operates as a form of power, deciding whose words become truth and whose are dismissed. Based on this understanding, the following recommendations are offered to guide reform in policy, education, media, and theory toward a more decolonial approach to justice and credibility.

Policy Reform

At the policy level, justice reform must confront the colonial assumptions that still shape policing, prosecution, and the courtroom. Credibility in legal decision-making often

depends on stereotypes rather than evidence. Training for police, lawyers, and magistrates should therefore include awareness of *epistemic bias*, the tendency to mistrust or undervalue testimonies based on race, class, or gender (Fricker, 2007).

Justice institutions must move beyond punitive approaches and adopt restorative, evidence-based procedures that protect both complainants and the accused. Establishing independent review panels for alleged false accusations could help ensure fairness, accountability, and transparency. Such reforms do not weaken the fight against gender-based violence; they strengthen it by ensuring that justice remains grounded in balance and integrity rather than prejudice.

Education and Community Practice

Education and public dialogue are central to transforming how society understands accusation, gender, and justice. Awareness programmes on gender-based violence should move beyond the binary of “victim” and “perpetrator” and instead examine how colonial and patriarchal power shape belief.

Schools, universities, and community initiatives can promote what might be called *gender empathy*, a practice that recognises how both men and women are differently harmed by historical systems of domination (Connell, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991). Including the *Coloniality of Accusations* in gender studies, criminology, and sociology curricula would encourage critical reflection on how history defines credibility.

Educational initiatives that emphasise accountability, respect, and dialogue can replace cultures of accusation with cultures of understanding. This approach does not erase responsibility; rather, it humanises it, encouraging collective reflection instead of moral polarisation.

Media Transformation

Media institutions also play a crucial role in shaping public perception. In South Africa, where the colonial gaze still influences visibility, reporting on sexual violence often reproduces racial hierarchies. Sensational coverage can destroy reputations before evidence is tested, reinforcing stereotypes of the violent Black man and the pure, endangered woman.

Journalists and editors should receive training in *ethical and decolonial reporting*. This includes upholding the presumption of innocence, avoiding racialised framing, and focusing on verified information rather than emotional spectacle. Following Mignolo's (2007) call for *decolonial ethics*, media storytelling must be centred on humanity rather than sensationalism. Balanced reporting not only protects survivors of real violence but also restores dignity to those who are falsely accused.

Theoretical Development

At the theoretical level, this study contributes to debates on power, knowledge, and justice by identifying *accusation* as an overlooked site of colonial control. While Foucault (1977) analysed how visibility and discipline regulate society, and Mbembe (2001)

described the moral afterlife of colonial rule, neither explored accusation as a distinct mechanism of power.

The *Coloniality of Accusations* extends these debates by conceptualising accusation as an *epistemic weapon*, a process through which colonial hierarchies of truth are continually reproduced. Future theorising should explore accusation not only as a legal act but also as a cultural and psychological practice that organises belief, suspicion, and punishment.

This invites new dialogue between decolonial thought, feminist theory, and masculinity studies. Such cross-disciplinary engagement can help scholars build frameworks that explain how credibility is historically racialized and how it might be reimagined toward equality.

6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has introduced a new way of understanding false rape allegations in South Africa by locating them within the wider structures of colonial and gendered power. Like all research, it has answered some questions while opening others. The *Coloniality of Accusations* should therefore be seen as a beginning rather than an end, a framework that invites further exploration of how inherited systems of belief continue to shape justice, truth, and humanity in postcolonial societies.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should explore women's perspectives in greater depth, particularly the emotional, social, and structural factors that may contribute to false sexual violence allegations. Such inquiry does not undermine the seriousness of GBV but rather, it expands understanding of how both harm and accountability are shaped by the same historical systems of inequality.

Research could also examine how economic insecurity, relational conflict, and mental health intersect with race and gender in the making of accusations. By analysing these factors together, scholars can deepen feminist, psychological, and decolonial debates about how power and vulnerability interact in everyday life.

Comparative and regional studies offer another valuable direction. Investigating similar cases in other South African provinces or across contexts such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, or the Caribbean could reveal whether the patterns identified in Gauteng reflect a broader African or global postcolonial condition. Such comparisons would refine the theoretical reach of the *Coloniality of Accusations* and demonstrate how accusation functions as a moral and political technology of power in different settings.

There is also a need for deeper sociological and psychological research into the lived effects of false accusations. Future work could explore how stigma shapes mental health, employment, and family life, and how individuals rebuild trust and belonging after being accused. Collaborative research between psychologists, gender scholars, and community organisations could help design trauma-informed interventions for both the falsely accused and survivors of genuine violence. This approach would advance a

more humane and restorative understanding of justice, one that attends to both harm and healing.

Finally, as digital platforms increasingly shape public opinion, the study of *digital accusations* presents a critical area for future inquiry. Online spaces now function as arenas of moral judgment where reputations can be destroyed instantly. Understanding how algorithmic visibility and online virality reproduce old colonial hierarchies of credibility will be essential for developing decolonial approaches to media ethics and digital justice.

Future studies should continue to develop decolonial models of justice that balance accountability with compassion. Drawing on Fanon's (1963) vision of restoring humanity and Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013) call to decolonise being and knowledge, researchers can work toward frameworks that move justice beyond punishment toward restoration and dialogue. This requires collaboration between legal theorists, philosophers, social scientists, and policymakers to redefine fairness in societies still marked by colonial trauma.

Such models would recognise that justice is not only about judging right and wrong but also about rebuilding trust and human connection. To decolonise justice is to make it empathetic by designing systems that protect the vulnerable, believe the silenced, and hold all people accountable with dignity and fairness.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This study began with a simple yet urgent question, the role of power in false rape allegations against Black men and why they persist in a democratic, post-apartheid South Africa? Through analysis of theory, history, and lived experience, it has shown that these allegations cannot be understood only in legal or moral terms. They are expressions of deeper colonial patterns that still shape who is seen, who is believed, and who is silenced.

It is thus important to note that this dissertation represents an effort toward independent thinking and decolonial scholarship. By rejecting the idea of the neutral and detached researcher, the study adopts what Grosfoguel (2007: 211) describes as an epistemic position that makes it possible to reveal experiences and perspectives that are often overlooked within traditional Western research approaches. The critical analytical tone and normative focus of this study are therefore intentional and are aimed at challenging the continued influence of colonial forms of knowledge and power (Mignolo 2002: 927). In doing so, the dissertation encourages future researchers to continue engaging in forms of epistemic disobedience that create space for the voices and experiences of individuals who remain marginalized within the South African legal system (Anzaldúa 1987: 3).

Moreover, the introduction of the *Coloniality of Accusations* marks a significant step in furthering the decolonial thought. . It reveals that accusation itself can act as an

epistemic weapon, one that reproduces colonial hierarchies by determining whose words count as truth. Yet it also offers hope: by exposing these hidden structures, we open possibilities for transformation.

Decolonising justice means more than reforming laws; it means rehumanising them. It calls for systems that protect women from violence and men from wrongful accusation, recognising both as products of the same unequal system of power. Addressing one without the other risks reinforcing the hierarchies that sustain injustice.

The *Coloniality of Accusations* stands as both a critique and a vision: a critique of the inherited systems that continue to shape credibility and justice, and a vision for a new moral imagination, one grounded in empathy, equality, and historical awareness. Decolonial justice begins with listening: the courage to hear stories that challenge accepted truths, and the humility to rebuild belief on the foundations of shared humanity. Only through such listening can South Africa, and societies like it, move closer to genuine freedom: a freedom not only to live, but also to be believed.

7. REFERENCES

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