Time's up: Recognising sexual violence as a public policy issue: A qualitative content analysis of sexual violence cases and the media

Camille Aroustamian

5 de Beauvoir Rd, N1 5SE London, UK

ABSTRACT

Using framing theory and research on sexual violence and the media, this study looks at media representations of three "high profile" sexual violence cases in two popular American newspapers. It explores key words, frames, and whether or not there have been any changes from 2014 to 2018. While laws exist in the U.S. to prevent sexual violence (e.g. Violence Against Women Act of 1994), sexual violence is a major public health issue in the U.S. According to the CDC, every 98 seconds someone is sexually assaulted; more than 570 people experience sexual violence in the country every day. In 2017, the #MeToo movement brought sexual violence to the limelight. The media plays an important role in practice, policy, and public perception of sexual violence; it is suggested that policies are influenced by public opinion. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on articles between 2014 and 2018 about Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, and Brock Turner published in the Washington Post and New York Times. While Cosby and Turner's cases are officially closed, Weinstein is awaiting trial. In total, 195 articles were coded. The results are supported by previous theories and studies. The analysis shows that articles about sexual assault often still use euphemisms, portray stereotypes, favour the perpetrator, show scepticism towards the survivors, and unnecessarily sensationalise the crimes. However, there seems to be a slight change after the Weinstein case and #MeToo. Articles from 2017 to 2018 employed the social science frame more. Additionally, thematic news framing was prevalent. This study ultimately aims to introduce a theory: that current media representations of sexual violence are inappropriate and may affect public opinion, thus playing a role in impeding policy change.

1. Introduction

While some may caution to not include any pending court cases, there is precedent that discussing Weinstein's is acceptable even if he's awaiting trial (Peters & Besley, 2019; Sherwyn & Wagner, 2018). In fact, Taylor and Francis have even recently released a special issue for June 2019 called "Journalism and Sexual Violence," which includes the #MeToo movement and Harvey Weinstein's case. Therefore, I have decided to continue this study including Weinstein's (pending) case.

People make decisions, enable progress, and change in societies. Countries cannot develop politically, economically, or socially when an overwhelming amount of its population is consistently subject to sexual violence or harassment. 81% of women in the U.S. have experienced sexual harassment; 20% of women will experience rape in their lifetimes; and 50% will experience sexual violence other than rape (CDC, 2017).

Sexual violence leaves both short and long-term impacts for survivors, like anxiety, depression, shame, and shock. Besides the psychological effects, there are medical costs, legal expenses, and mental health service fees. Sexual violence creates a climate of fear in societies. Studies have also found that sexual assault can disrupt survivors' employment (Loya, 2014).

There clearly needs to be policy implementation and there have

been—the Violence Against Women act aimed to investigate and prosecute violent crimes against women. This is an example of how lawmakers can both form and are formed by public policy. But first, we need to examine the positions, attitudes, and cultural ideals surrounding sexual violence.

Even at my (very liberal and progressive) college, I saw rape culture in the flesh. There were fraternity chants—"No means yes and yes means anal." Four years later, Donald Trump, known to harass and disrespect women, won the United States presidency. In the following year, dozens of men in power followed a pattern of taking advantage of women with no real consequences. The primary driving motivation for this study was re-ignited when I began my research and found that there were no studies that showed significant links between sexual violence and policy, even though sexual violence is as important of a policy issue as gun rights or immigration. Nevertheless, there were some important studies that discussed sexual violence and the media.

In the past four years, sexual violence, including campus rape and sexual harassment in the workplace received a substantial amount of attention in the media partly because of three publicized cases: Brock Turner, the Stanford University student athlete, Bill Cosby, and Harvey Weinstein. These cases influence public discourse because celebrities have social influence (Fraser & Brown, 2002).

The way media frames sexual violence is vital because it can

influence public perceptions in how people understand certain social problems; in this case, sexual violence and harassment. Frames also have the ability to influence individual's attitudes, beliefs, and attributions of blame and responsibility. Previous findings show that there are still significant stereotypes portrayed by the media to the public regarding sexual assault cases, which shape public opinion and perpetuate rape culture. Consequently, negative and inappropriate media representations of victims and perpetrators of sexual assault/rape can hinder sexual assault policy and impede progress. While political and legal willpower is important for change, public support is also an important factor.

The cases analysed in this study show how American society does not effectively handle sexual violence and harassment. The study aims to make clear the current representations of sexual violence survivors and their perpetrators in publicized cases, as well to explore any changes spanning the past four years. The results will show that media representations are saturated with euphemisms, sympathetic language towards perpetrators, and confusing language when describing sexual violence. Also, results will show that after Harvey Weinstein/MeToo, the social science frame and thematic one were more prevalent.

Since #MeToo demonstrated that there are inconsistencies in law and policy about sexual violence, this study is being done at an appropriate time. While not explorative entirely, this study sets out to prove something that should have been proven a long time ago: the media does not know how to report on sexual violence as well as it can and that in order to change cultural attitudes about rape and sexual assault, the media needs to do a better job. The research question of this study is: *How are survivors and perpetrators of highly publicized sexual violence cases represented and framed in elite American newspapers?*

In the subsequent chapters, I focus on the following - In the second half of this chapter, I review some important background information to sexual violence and what it actually means. In the second chapter, I discuss the literature review on framing theory, and then on sexual violence, language, the media and the perpetuation of rape culture. The third chapter introduces the research question and its development. In chapter four, I discuss the research design employed in carrying out this study. Finally, I review the results and its analysis in this study. The main objective is to contribute to the limited knowledge about sexual violence survivors and the media, but also to current understandings of framing theory and public attitudes.

1.1. Background

Sexual violence is defined as "a sexual act committed against someone without his or her consent" (CDC, 2018). The CDC also describes types of sexual violence acts: completed or attempted forced penetration, alcohol or drug-facilitated penetration of a victim, forced acts in which a victim is made to penetrate someone, and unwanted sexual contact.

In the early 1970s, second-wave feminism fought for equal pay, abortion rights, and sexual liberation. They also challenged to put these issues on the public agenda and change the way media represents sexual violence and is understood by the public (Kitzinger, 2004). Today, sexual violence continues to be a social and cultural problem in American society and is so prevalent that it "produces social, physical, and psychological effects that often persist for years" (Hodgson & Kelley, 2001, pp. 1).

The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) found that the legal justice system largely focuses on the victim's credibility rather than the injury or sensitive treatment of the survivor (OJP, 1998). There is no other crime in the criminal justice system that questions victims complaints (e.g. calling victims "accusers"). Since white, male, middle-class, Christian, educated, heterosexual, and patriarchal qualities are still dominant in culture, there is a lack of adequate laws, policies, procedures, and emphasis (Hodgson & Kelley, 2001). As a result, the majority of perpetrators will not go to jail or prison. In addition,

perpetrators of sexual violence are less likely to be punished than other criminals (RAINN, 2018). Consequently, many survivors feel that either the police will not adequately handle the case or will be treated with scepticism.

Journalism and media play an important role by educating the public about sexual violence issues. Representations of sex crimes (rape and child abuse) often portray a distorted image of the reality of the crimes and tend to focus on violent crimes committed by strangers and poor men of colour (Serisier, 2017). Other criticisms of media coverage include the focus of the victim's behaviour, such as drinking, flirting, or being simply unlucky.

Since the emergence of second-wave feminism, there have been some changes in media representations of sex crimes (Serisier, 2017). While more women report in media, today's news still perpetuates myths and stereotypes about rape victims and rapists (O'Hara, 2012).

During the women's liberation movement (WLM), feminists argued that rape and sexual violence are caused by a culture of violence against and disrespect for women. Undoubtedly, the WLM changed the way society and media represent and discuss sexual violence. Journalists finally recognized sexual violence as a serious issue and certain myths like "women enjoy being raped" disappeared (Kitzinger, 2004, pp. 18).

Indeed, public opinion can lead to changes at the judicial level. For example, a Seattle news station aired footage of a senator exclaiming on the Senate floor: "Well, if you can't rape your wife, who can you rape?" This led to the removal of the marital exclusion from Washington state law (Kitzinger, 2004).

The media are responsible for how allegations of sexual violence are characterized. More recently, Harvey Weinstein's rape and assault accusations started the #MeToo movement on social media after Alyssa Milano wrote on Twitter that anybody who has been sexually harassed or assaulted should reply with "MeToo." This resulted in 1.7 million tweets and 12 million posts and comments (Thomson, 2018). The #MeToo movement proves that we should take these issues seriously.

1.2. Legal definitions

1. **Sexual assault**- "any non-consensual sexual act proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks capacity to consent" (US Department of Justice).
2. **Rape**- "the crime of sexual intercourse without consent and accomplished through force, threat of violence or intimidation (such as a threat to harm a woman's child, husband or boyfriend). What constitutes lack of consent usually includes saying 'no' or being too drunk or drug-influenced for the woman to be able to either resist or consent" (LAW.COM).
3. **Molestation**- "the crime of sexual acts with **children** up to the age of 18, including touching of private parts, exposure of genitalia, taking of pornographic pictures, rape, inducement of sexual acts with the molester or with other children and variations of these acts by paedophiles. Molestation also applies to incest by a relative with a minor family member and any unwanted sexual acts *with adults short of rape*" (LAW.COM).
4. **Sexual misconduct**- "unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that constitutes sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence (including domestic violence and dating violence), or stalking, and includes related acts of retaliation" (https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/definitions).
5. **Sexual harassment**- "any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, including sexual advances, request for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual or gender-based nature" (https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/definitions).
6. **Indictment**- "a charge of a felony voted by a Grand Jury based upon a proposed charge, witnesses' testimony and other evidence presented by the public prosecutor (District Attorney). To bring an indictment the Grand Jury will not find guilt, but only the probability that a crime was committed, that the accused person did it and that

he/she should be tried" (LAW.COM).

7. **Statute of limitations**- "a law which sets the maximum period which one can wait before filing a lawsuit, depending on the type of case or claim." The periods vary by state. Federal statutes set the limitations for suits filed in federal courts (LAW.COM). Example: Before September 2016, the statute of limitations in California for rape and sex crimes was just 10 years.

2. Literature review

"*The press is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision.*" W. Lippmann (1922).

While this is an inductive study and hopes to present a new theory, even in inductive studies, the researcher could use existing theories and literature to formulate research questions (Saunders et al., 2017). This section discusses framing theory, sexual violence, rape culture, the media and how they relate to each other.

2.1. Framing theory

For the last 40 years, theorists and researchers have studied the effects of mass media, which allowed us to understand the processes behind mass media communication and public opinion (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006; Entman, 2010; Goffman, 1977; Protess & McCombs, 1991; Springer & Harwood, 2014; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Bing & Lombardo, 1997). Literature on mass media effects focus on the three main processes of media influence: agenda-setting, priming, and framing. Framing is the primary theoretical framework of this study because it deals with the content of media coverage and how different ways of reporting the same issue can result in different responses rather than just the effects of media coverage.

Agenda-setting claims that "there is a correlation between the emphasis that mass media places on issues and how important audiences find them to be" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006, pp. 11). Walter Lippmann's book "Public Opinion" is recognized as the first published piece to describe the "pictures in our heads" (Lippmann, 1921; Protess & McCombs, 1991). He argued that things in modern life occur because somebody has given shape to them. In other words, the media censors and edits the news that it wishes the public to hear and see.

It was only when McCombs and Shaw (1972) tested Lipmann's theory that agenda-setting became serious in the field of communications. Their data on the 1968 presidential campaign suggested that there was a strong relationship between the salience of campaign issues by the media and voter's opinions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The news agenda is more likely to be influenced by stories in elite newspapers, like the New York Times. This finding was supported in Stephen Reese and Lucig Danielian's 1986 cocaine epidemic coverage that identified the New York Times set the media agenda for television networks (Reese & Danielian, 1989). This gave way to priming theory.

The basic premise of priming theory is that the media drives public discourse of issues (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982). The amount of time the media devotes to specific issues makes audiences open-minded and aware of particular themes.

They discovered that "by attending to some problems and ignoring others, media may also alter the standards by which people evaluate government" (1982, pp. 849). This implies that when the media makes some issues more pertinent in people's minds, they also shape people's judgments about political candidates or issues. Agenda-setting and priming are both powerful media effects. Another important theory that explains mass media influence is called framing theory.

Williams, Shapiro, and Cutbirth (1983) studied how frames are used in newscasts. They found that the media often uses frames for events to give them meaning. The psychological basis of framing lies in Tversky and Kahneman (1981) and Kahneman and Tversky (1984) work, which

examined how different manifestations of identical decision-making situations influence people's choices and the reasons they choose certain options. Goffman (1977) laid out the sociological foundations, which assumes that people cannot understand the world fully and have difficulty making sense of the world.

In an effort to clarify what framing actually means, Entman defines it as "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (1993, pp. 52). He goes on to say that frames are located in "keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images" (Entman, 1993, pp. 7).

For example, the "cold war" frame was prominent in the U.S. news. It "highlighted civil wars as problems, identified the source, offered moral judgments, and put certain solutions on the table" (pp. 52). Media frames determine what people notice and how they understand/remember specific issues, as well as how to act (Entman, 1993). It shows that frames have common effects on most people and are often employed by elites.

Media framing is incredibly important when it pertains to political and/or social issues. For example, during the war, there were two policies presented—war now or sanctions now with war later (Entman, 1989; Goffman, 1977). If the media decided to critique these two views, they breached the bounds acceptable discussion. Elites liked this because without the media attention, there would be little effect on public opinion, which means they felt no pressure to act. This implies that elites can use the media to maintain power over public opinion.

There is a difference between media frames and individual frames. Media frames are characteristics of the news, while individual frames are "cognitive schemas" (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015, pp. 431). Individual frames are frames in which people interpret reality and the schemas in which new information is generated. These frames can influence the attitudes and behaviour of individuals.

Iyengar (1996) and others specifically focus on "framing effects," which refer to how some media frames influence individual frames and attitudes. Several studies over the past 30 years have provided evidence for framing effects (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Druckman, 2001; Lewis et al., 2014).

Iyengar classifies media frames as either: generic (**thematic)** and specific (**episodic)**. While thematic frames can be applied with greater flexibility, episodic frames are only applied to specific topics or events. Nelson and Kinder (1996) also add that when episodic frames are employed, the beneficiaries of a policy (e.g. survivors of sexual violence), attitudes towards that group influence attitudes towards the policy.

Iyengar's content analysis of television newscasts hypothesised that media framing alters how people assign responsibility (Scheufele, 1999). Iyengar also concluded that the media uses episodic news framing in order to deflect accountability from elected officials, which is supported by other scholars as well.

Palazzolo and Roberto (2011) explain in their study that, "message content can elicit emotions in predictable ways" (pp. 14). They explored how including or excluding information on male perpetrators of violence and female "victims" influences reader's responses (ANROWS, 2015). They found that readers exposed to information designed to increase perpetrator responsibility were more likely to blame the perpetrator and hope for punishment. Participants exposed to background information about perpetrators were less likely to call for punishment and were more likely to sympathise towards the perpetrators (ANROWS, 2015).

In the last few years, as the media becomes more important in shaping public attitudes and opinion, there have also been more in depth studies on media frames through qualitative content analyses. New studies have changed our understanding of how and what frames are employed (An & Gower, 2009; Schuldt & Roh, 2014). Considering the empirical and theoretical evidence about media and framing theory, it is unsurprising that the media plays an important role in how the

public perceives sexual violence, its victims and perpetrators. Concluding this discussion, "exposure to mass media content indirectly affects behaviour by shaping cultural norms" (Baxter, 1985, pp. 1).

Empirical studies (Dickson, 1994; Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999) show that media content "is biased towards some political issues and cultural norms. These support the idea that not only does the media affect society, but reflects it.

2.2. Sexual assault, the media and why language matters

Given the theoretical and empirical evidence discussed in the previous section, it is not shocking that the media can help bring awareness to sexual assault by giving all sides a chance to speak their voices, to examine attitudes, and help people see and understand.

Literature on sexual violence and media (especially in the U.S.) is really limited. The lack of current studies on the subject is evident in searches. Schwark's (2007) study of visual representations of sexual violence in online news outlets and Kitzinger's work on women and media is particularly helpful. This study however utilises general findings from research on sexual violence and the media, mostly concentrated on visual representations or was done so long ago that it is no longer so relevant (given the fact that Twitter did not exist 15 years ago).

One problem I came across was that language surrounding sexual violence is confusing and that it is evident in news stories. Perhaps the reason for this is because the language of sexual violence itself has been a battleground. Up until 2012, the FBI defined rape as "the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will" (RAINN, 2018). In law, carnal knowledge usually means heterosexual penetrative intercourse. Consequently, men could not be raped and the penetration of a vagina by any foreign object besides a penis was not rape. As a result, girls and even boys are often unable to name their experiences of rape or sexual assault. According to Hlavka (2014), there may not be a lack of language of sexual violence, but instead they are not integrated in meaningful ways.

One of the main findings in this study is that newspapers often use euphemisms to describe sexual violence. According to Merriam-Webster, a euphemism is "a mild or pleasant word or phrase that is used instead of one that is unpleasant or offensive." Euphemisms are meant to represent the meaning of the replaced word/phrase, while changing the emotional subtlety with a less charged word (Neal, 2015). This can lead readers to draw different meanings than what the speaker intended. For example, a witness who saw famous college football coach, Jerry Sandusky sexually assault a young male described the situation as "horsing around," a euphemism so far removed from the act of sexually assaulting a boy that the interpretation is not rape at all (Neal, 2015).

A related finding in the literature is that the media reporting on sexual violence tends to perpetuate sexual violence stereotypes. Scholars like Jenny Kitzinger (2004) found that historically, media coverage of sexual violence against women and children "could decontextualize abuse, promote stereotypes of women, blame victims, and excuse assailants (pp. 14)."

For example, the media mostly ignored domestic violence issues until the mid-1970s, with the phrase "wife beating" prominent in many articles of the year. Moreover, until the 1970s, the media avoided the word "rape," instead using "carnal knowledge." Another important finding by Kitzinger (2001) was that media representation is a vital part of women's process of remembering and communicating sexual violence experiences, but media coverage contributes to fundamental changes privately and publicly. While the media has made progress over the past 50 years, there are still important criticisms (e.g. "events-based" reporting, focus on controversy, excusing perpetrators, perpetuating victim stereotypes).

A more recent study was O'Hara's (2012) on rape myths in the news media's coverage of sexual violence. Through a lexical analysis, she found that news media frequently portrays rapists as "monsters" and

victims as "virgins" attacked by these monsters. She concluded that these depictions can impact public opinion and can be harmful to rape victims when they are used in courtrooms (2012).

In a related study, Sacks, Ackerman, and Shlosberg (2018) conducted a content analysis of local newspaper reporting in the U.S. and found that reports on sexual assault may indirectly bolster some of the generally acknowledged rape myths. They also found that the articles often questioned the victim's credibility and conflated rape with sex. In another study, Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, and Vandello (2008) found that rape myths were present in more than one-third of the articles.

The ways rapists are represented in media often perpetuate myths and distorted facts (Wood, 1994). It was found that there is a strong relationship between how women view sexual violence and their acceptance of sexual violence as a normal part of their relationship.

A general finding in the literature is that language is incredibly important. A quote from Dart Centre for Journalism & Trauma illustrates this:

> "*Rape is violence, not 'sex'. Reporting on sexual assault means finding not only the language but the context and sensitivity to communicate a trauma that is at once deeply personal and yet a matter of public policy; immediate and yet freighted with centuries of stigma, silence and suppression. Reporting on sexual violence requires special ethical sensitivity, interviewing skills, and knowledge about victims, perpetrators, law and psychology*" *(2018).*

Language is not neutral and word choices by friends, family, the courts, and media can haunt survivors long afterwards. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the way in which we report and speak about sexual violence (femifesto, 2018). For example, the excessive use of "alleged" or "claimed" implies disbelief of survivors on the part of the reporter. Likewise, calling the survivor an "accuser" implies that she is the one doing something to the perpetrator. In other words, she is the perpetrator of the accusation against him. Instead, use "said," "according to," or "reports." Another example is that using euphemisms like: "engaging in" or "sex scandal" diminishes the crime and sensationalizes it. Instead call it what it is: rape, sexual assault, etc.

An important finding pertaining to celebrity cases is Franiuk et al. (2008), who found that 10% of the articles about Kobe Bryant's alleged sexual assault had a rape myth-endorsing headline (e.g., "she is lying" or "she asked for it"). Further, when they exposed participants to those same headlines, men were "more likely to support rape-supportive attitudes and less likely to think Kobe was guilty" (Schwark, 2017, pp. 3).

It is important to explain why this study focuses on two celebrity cases out of the three. Harvey (2018) explains that celebrities have the power to spotlight issues in the media and persuade audiences. Whether or not Weinstein wanted to use their media presence, they successfully created a social movement.

Another problem in sexual violence cases is that each state in the U.S. uses different terms—sexual assault, rape, and sexual battery to describe essentially the same act (RAINN). This kind of confusion is very clearly seen in news reports. While there have been no studies to my knowledge that examine the frequency of the words "sexual assault" and "rape," there is enough information in the literature that implies the differentiation is important to examine. For example, in 2014, the American politician Todd Akin announced that there is such a thing as "legitimate rape," a term that does not make sense. This inadequate and complicated language of sexual violence deserves to be studied more in depth.

Bing and Lombardo's (1997) work eventually solidified the methodology of this study, which identified that there are four common frames that raise different expectations about defining behaviour as harassment. Whereas they analysed newspapers about sexual harassment, specifically, this study examines any form of sexual violence.

Although these studies give a general idea about media representations of sexual violence survivors and perpetrators in the U.S. media, there is an incomplete understanding. The studies are too

general and do not properly connect. That is, there are only a few studies on specific (publicized) sexual violence cases that are represented in popular newspapers and possible effects on public opinion. In addition, they do not seriously consider sexual violence as a policy issue.

Due to time constraints, it was not realistic to examine whether there is a relationship between media representation of sexual assault cases and public opinion/attitudes towards survivors and/or perpetrators. However, there is plenty of recent research and evidence in the literature where some conclusions can be presented or alluded to.

2.3. Re-victimisation & media's role in perpetuating rape culture

Rape culture is defined as "a set of values and beliefs that provide an environment conducive to rape" (Boswell & Spade, 1996), where "rape is often not acknowledged as a crime and its victims are frequently blamed…for their own violation" (Vogelman, 1990).

Re-victimisation in the justice system is described as "the actions of the police, that often make a woman feel like the criminal, and the courts, where many women report feeling violated for a second time by the legal process" (Mcleer, 1998).

In fact, one finding in recent years has been that the influence of rape culture on justice professionals are vast; police, attorneys, judges, and even jurors hold prejudices that can affect the way violence against women is treated in the legal system (Mukhopadhyay, 2008). For example, any evidence that shows the victim had been intoxicated lead jurors to doubt whether a rape occurred (Allison & Wrightsman, 1995).

In 2013, Baum, Cohen, and Zhukov offered the first quantitative analysis of rape culture in the United States. They concluded that in jurisdictions where rape culture was more common, there was more reported rape cases, but the police were less likely to purse them. In other words, where the media perpetuates rape culture, there is more rape.

It seems that rape victims are more and more being re-victimized by the media as somehow being blame-worthy for the pain inflicted on them by their attackers. Although there is some research on the physical re-victimisation of rape victims (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Classen, Palesh, & Aggarwal, 2005), less is known about media re-victimisation.

Media re-victimisation refers to the "use of words and framing to create an impression that victim has somehow brought the assault upon herself whether it's through revealing clothing or being in the wrong place at the wrong time" (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2015). Reporting a rape or sexual assault in this way can re-victimise the victim. Such reports could possibly lead to re-victimisation problems highlighted by Classen et al. (2005) such as "difficulty in interpersonal relationships, coping, self-representations, and affect regulation and exhibit greater self-blame and shame" (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2015). The blaming of victims by media also contributes to the re-victimisation of women (Thacker and Day, pg. 95).

The media often perpetuates rape culture by repeat narratives (victim blaming) and since media shapes the way that people think about social problems (such as sexual violence), it's incredibly important to be aware of how we describe victims (Berns, 2004). The way that most of the media reports on sexual assault cases creates further misery and damage to the victims.

Later on, this paper discusses and also proves that vocabulary is important and the media reporters have the authority in the way they describe rape, often using words like "fondled" and "caressed" when describing sexual assault (Benedict, 1992, p.103–104). This type of language has consequences; responsibility is wrongly assigned to the rape survivor, which then leads to individuals who were exposed to rape often assume the victim is also partly to blame for her victimisation.

3. Research questions

The present study is concerned with understanding sexual violence in the context of media representations in the United States and how survivors and perpetrators are portrayed in the media. Since the MeToo and Time's Up movements took off in 2017, the government repeatedly acknowledged that there is a problem with sexual assault and harassment policies. Therefore, it is not only necessary to study how the media reports sexual violence but it is long overdue. Since this study employs a qualitative content analysis, rather than a quantitative one, the research question and identifiable themes were constructed during and after data collection.

The study aims to answer one main research question:

- *How are survivors and perpetrators of highly publicized sexual violence cases represented and framed in elite American newspapers and what are some implications?*

This study ultimately theorises that the media's language and framing may contribute to U.S. public opinion on sexual violence. Thus, the way media is framed can indirectly affect policy-making.

Through repeated examination and comparison of data, there several findings:

1. *Stories about Harvey Weinstein and Brock Turner are framed in the thematic frame more than episodic.*
2. *There are four main frames in sexual violence stories.*
3. *Articles are often sceptical towards the survivor, sensationalise stories by using euphemisms, and sympathise with the perpetrator.*

The challenges surrounding sexual violence, whether on college campuses or in workplaces still persist in the U.S., which leaves the assumption that current media representations of sexual assault/rape victims are positive or less focused on the male perpetrator's accomplishments. While there has not been immense progress in the process of preventing sexual assault and rape in the U.S. by policy, RAINN (2018) claims to "work with policy makers to pass key federal laws and educate the public" (e.g. Debbie Smith Act, Clery Act, and Campus SaVE Act). Perhaps the most important issue is how the media deals with all of it. It is likely that since #MeToo erupted, there has been a slight improvement in the media representations of sexual violence survivors and in general, how the media reports on public sexual assault/rape cases.

Previous research and findings show that media representations of sexual violence survivors and perpetrators are largely focused on the perpetrator and perpetuate stereotypes. However, recent research shows that social media movements like #MeToo may have a lasting impact (Perry Undem, 2017). This leads to the conclusion that after the #MeToo movement, media reporting shifted and therefore, the social science frame is most used afterwards.

In the next section, I discuss the method I employed in this study.

4. Methodology and research design

The goal of qualitative research is to develop concepts that allow us to better understand certain social issues, focusing on experiences of a group or situations by extracting meanings of texts or objects (Mays & Pope, 1995).

The literature review already showed that while there are theoretical frameworks about media, language, and sexual violence, empirical knowledge about the topic is fragmented. This study employs a qualitative content analysis to analyse newspaper articles (also called a textual or news frame analysis). Studies that apply a qualitative content analysis to material from public sources (news reports, legal documents, advertisements) are often about social meaning (Schreier, 2013). Wimmer and Dominick (2006) add that news frame analyses can

establish a starting point for studies of media effects. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative content analysis but also utilises a news frame analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is a type of research method used to analyse textual data (e.g. grounded theory or ethnographies). This study specifically employs a *summative* qualitative content analysis, which involves "counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content and then explanations of context" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1). A study that uses this approach quantifies certain words or content in text with in order to understand the context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). However, this method goes beyond just a quantitative analysis; it includes latent content analysis, which aims to discover hidden meanings of the words or content (Babbie, 1992; Morse & Field, 1996). This is both in line with the literature on framing theory and sexual violence and the media.

Since its conception, content analysis primarily employed a quantitative approach. It wasn't until the 1940s that content analysis began to attract the attention of researchers outside communications studies, like Lasswell's (1927) propaganda analysis, which paved the way for content analysis in political science.

In 1952, Kracauer (1952) argued against using purely quantitative types of content analysis based on three grounds:

"*Meaning is often complex, holistic and context-dependent. Meaning is not always manifest and clear at first sight*" (Schreier, 2013, pp. 13.)

While quantitative content analyses deal mainly with numerical data, qualitative content analyses are also descriptive. Since it is inductive, the researcher's decisions involve interpretation and then putting things in categories (Dey, 1993; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). For example, Ogundola's (2013) study employed a qualitative analysis in examining how newspapers in Nigeria frame disability.

Qualitative content analysis has a straightforward procedure due to new developments in the field. In this particular study, steps included: selecting the unit of analysis (newspapers), open coding and making notes (memos), formulating preliminary codes, data coding, revising codes, and eventually developing themes/categories into a coding scheme (Cho & Lee, 2018).

Qualitative content analysis, like any qualitative research is interpretive in three ways: it handles symbolic material that needs interpretation; different interpretations can be valid; it deals with questions that explore personal or social meanings (Schreier, 2014). Qualitative content analysis is an appropriate methodology for this study, but since there are no simple guidelines, it is also challenging (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

This is why a summative inductive content analysis is encouraged for this study. In fact, Schreier (2014) admits that it is rare in qualitative content analysis to create a coding frame that is purely inductive or purely deductive. Therefore, a typical and acceptable mix would be to come up with topics based on previous studies or research and turn them into main categories as this study does. Then, the researcher should specify what is said about these topics by creating subcategories based on one's own data material.

Consequently, I first read through each article and openly coded using NVivo's "memos" tool. Codes, categories, and themes were identified during and after the analysis. Frames were then derived, utilizing Bing & Lombardo's, 1997 study. Ultimately, themes and frames were then coded (see Appendices 5–7).

The present paper examines data from a content analysis conducted on newspapers from 2014 to 2018. November 17th, 2014 is the date in which the first article about Bill Cosby appears when searched. Likewise, the first article about Brock Turner appears on May 17th, 2015 and October 11th is the date in which Weinstein's rape and sexual assault allegations came to light. The key moment in this timeline is shortly after Weinstein's allegations became public, when #MeToo spread on the Internet in October 2017 to demonstrate how prevalent sexual assault and harassment are.

Four years is enough time to assume that there have been small changes in media reporting, especially when factoring in #MeToo. In fact, Perry Undem (2017), a public opinion research firm found that on November 9th, 2016 a new women's movement erupted. That combined with Hillary Clinton's loss, President Trump's inappropriate comments, and the Women's March may have contributed to "a new atmosphere in which women are coming forward around sexual assault and harassment" (Perry Undem, 2017). There is no doubt that there are some major shifts about the way we view sexual violence and perceptions surrounding culture and power in our society. These changes have the power to affect legislation and policy change within states and also the country as a whole.

I am aware that as a woman who experienced and witnesses sexual harassment and assault that this bias may influence some findings. However, as a qualitative researcher, being objective is not the goal—reflexivity is. I am aware of the analytic focus of my relationship to the study and also the cultural practices involved which require self-awareness. It is also important to keep in mind the concept of trustworthiness, which consists of four components: credibility, transferability, reliability, and dependability (Schreier, 2014). There is enough evidence in the data to prove that if this study is repeated, researchers will reach the same conclusions.

Finally, while it is recommended to have a second coder to assure maximum accuracy, given the time constraints and lack of resources, it is also acceptable to conduct analysis alone (Schreier, 2014, pp. 19).

4.1. Sample and unit of analysis

Since it was not possible to analyse *all* articles about Cosby, Turner, and Weinstein in the four years of interest, two online newspapers were selected for analysi*s: The New York Times and The Washington Post.* The newspapers were chosen because they are both popular elite news sources in the U.S.

The unit of analysis is the 195 individual articles. The coding units are comprised of the words and sentences I assigned to categories in the coding frame (see Appendix 5). Data analysis started with computer-assisted searches using Lexis Nexis' library service. For all years, the search was conducted using key words: "Harvey Weinstein AND rape AND sexual assault," "Bill Cosby AND rape AND sexual assault," and "Harvey Weinstein AND rape AND sexual assault." Newspaper specification was selected to ensure that only articles from the New York Times and Washington Post were selected.

All types of news were selected: updates, opinion pieces, and hard news. The search initially retrieved 1284 articles over four years. Because of the large amount, for search results of over 100, every fifth article was chosen. For results under 100, every other article was selected and for results less than 50, all articles were selected. In total, 195 articles were chosen for analysis: 46 for Brock Turner, 65 for Bill Cosby, and 84 for Harvey Weinstein. In any research, true random sampling is difficult to accomplish, but by choosing every other 5 or 1 article, sequential sampling (non-probability sampling) was successfully employed.

I searched both "rape" and "sexual assault" because it is mainly up to the journalists as to which words they use. This further illustrates the confusion surrounding sexual violence language. In total, there were 673 mentions of "sexual assault," and 481 mentions of "rape."

4.2. Coding scheme/operational definitions

The coding scheme used in the analysis is based on previous studies and the literature reviewed. According to Wood (1994), if other researchers have studied the concepts, it is recommended to consider their definitions. After reading through the articles, it was found that there were predefined features of media representations of sexual violence, and the main frames utilized. The coding scheme requires understanding and judgement on behalf of the researcher, like overall

tone, dominant frames, description sexual violence acts, and sensationalism. Categories for the frames, key words and definitions were then constructed.

After the articles were selected, they were imported into NVivo to begin forming definitions. NVivo's software utilises the function of "nodes," which are "collections of references about specific themes, places, persons, or any other areas of interest" (NVivo, 2018). There are parent nodes (general topics) and child nodes (more specific). Researchers can gather the references by "coding" sources such as articles.

Once imported to the software, a word cloud was created to show common terms (see Appendix 1). Then, word frequency counts for each of the three cases in both newspapers were calculated and compared. Common words included: "sex scandal," "assault," "rape," "sex," "accusers," and "#metoo." For example, a euphemism like "misconduct" when substituted for "rape" is to be coded.

In order to find common frames, I critically looked out for metaphors, catch phrases, and terms employed to describe people or issues. For example, a paragraph describing Cosby's "almost comeback" would fall under the initiator frame.

There was a node created for "description of acts," which then gave way to sub-nodes, "encounter," "engaged in," and "molested." For the themes, nodes were simply created called: "judicial," "social science," "initiator," and "victim."

NVivo made it easy to search for word frequencies, but also to code sentences into categories that showed dominant frames and stereotypes. Indeed, most qualitative researchers code their data during and also after collection because coding *is* analysis. On the other hand, some think, "Coding and analysis are not synonymous, though coding is a crucial aspect of analysis" (Basit, 2003, p. 145). This study is in line with the former.

While there are dozens of other high profile and public sexual assault/rape/harassment cases, such as: Donald Trump, Al Franken, R Kelly, Kevin Spacey, and Louis C.K., the three cases selected are enough to indicate some trends in the main national news media, which influence other news sources and publications. This study is meant to motivate and encourage future research that includes other newspapers or other media outlets, like television and movies and to also consider public opinion effects and the media. Such studies would allow for more general conclusions about the media representations of sexual violence.

In summary, the coding process involved 4 steps: coding, categorization and sub-categorization, themes/concepts, and presenting results.

5. Language used in case judgments

This section lays out two judgments and one indictment pertaining specifically to Brock Turner, Bill Cosby, and Harvey Weinstein. Language used in judgments/indictments is often straight-forward, includes legal jargon and with an objective aim, avoiding euphemisms and "sugar coating" crimes. The media should model language employed during indictment proceedings and judgments.

1. Andrea Constand, Plaintiff v. William H. Cosby, JR, Defendant Civil Action, No. 05-CV-

- *"Subsequently, Defendant positioned himself behind plaintiff on the sofa, touched her breasts and vaginal area, **rubbed his penis against her hand**, and digitally penetrated her."*
- *"Plaintiff has **suffered serious and debilitating injuries**, mental anguish, humiliation, embarrassment, physical and emotional upset, including, but not limited to, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, sleeplessness, isolation, flashbacks, anxiety…etc."*
- *"Plaintiff suffered and will in the future continue to suffer serious pain, mental anguish, emotional upset, and **the loss of enjoyment of life's pleasures**."*

2. The People of the State of California vs. Brock Allen Turner, No. B1577162.

   Charges:

- Count One, Section 220 (a) (1) of the Penal Code (**Assault with Intent to Commit Felony, Rape or an Intoxicated or Unconscious Person**)
- Count Two, Section 289 (e) of the Penal Code (**Sexual Penetration when the Victim was Intoxicated**)
- Count three, Section 289 (d) of the Penal Code (**Sexual Penetration where the Victim was Unconscious of the Nature of the Act**)

3. The People of the State of New York against Harvey Weinstein, Indictment

- **First count**: Criminal sexual act in the first degree
- *"The defendant engaged in **oral sexual conduct by forcible compulsion** with a person known to the Grand Jury, to wit, contact between **defendant's penis and the mouth of a person** known to the Grand Jury."*
- **Second count**: Rape in the first degree
- **Third count**: Rape in the third degree

6. Results

To answer the research questions and form categories and themes, the articles were read thoroughly and in detail using a qualitative method to code each of the chosen articles. The results show that reporters continue to inappropriately and inaccurately describe sexual violence and also use sympathetic words towards the perpetrator. However, after the #MeToo movement and Harvey Weinstein's case, more stories used a social science frame. Finally, thematic frames were used more post-#MeToo, which shows an increased interest in the survivor's portrayal in the media and how we should respond to this issue as a whole.

The following sections of this chapter present detailed analyses of media representations of sexual violence in the U.S. This section hopes to explore the research question of how survivors and perpetrators of highly publicized sexual violence cases represented and framed in elite American newspapers and also to point out some implications.

6.1. Finding 1: Euphemisms and confusing language

The analysis of this category was simpler than the others because it was coded for one or two words. Results showed that most articles used "sexual assault" to describe the actions. In fact, to describe Brock Turner's actions, writers used "sexual assault" 385 times, while "rape" was mentioned 266 times. Stories often used the words interchangeably, adding to the confusion surrounding sexual violence language.

For example, a headline of an Associated Press article read, *"Judge in Stanford rape case fights recall,"* when the first sentence described the act as "sexual assault." Many writers have felt that even writing, "He sexually assaulted her" is vague and feels censored. In a way, the violence of the act disappears (Grady, 2017).

In addition to this, many articles used euphemisms like "non-consensual sex." *The New York Times* used this phrase 12 times and the *WP* just once to describe the actions of Harvey Weinstein. The euphemism mentioned the most was "misconduct" (42.7% or 135 times, see Fig. 1).

While the legal definition of consent differs between states, it is understood that consent must be given freely and within the individual's capacity (RAINN). Consent is given without coercion or threat. This kind of language confuses not only the public, but makes it harder for sexual violence survivors to feel supported by the media.

Other problematic language includes "oral sex," which was
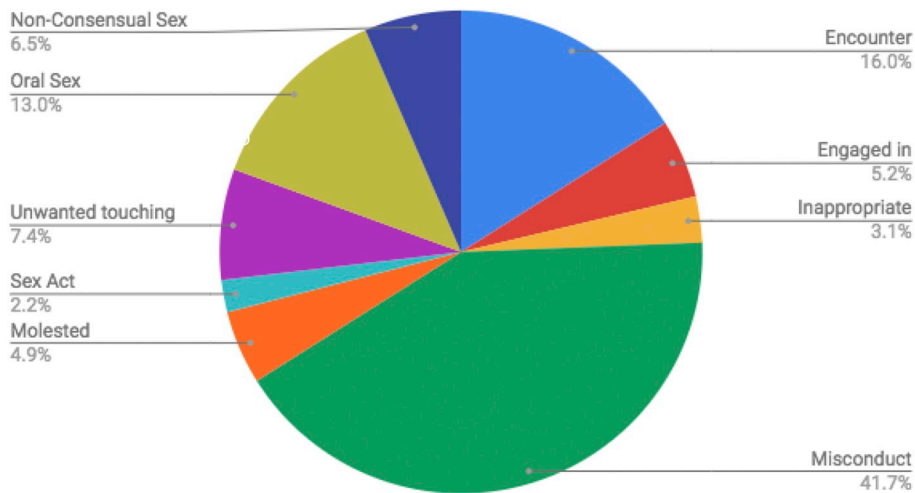
Euphemisms found in articles

Fig. 1. Types of euphemisms found in the news stories.

mentioned 44 times and made up 13% of euphemistic terms. *An example from the NYT:*

> *"The updated indictment released on Monday accuses Mr. Weinstein of using force to compel a woman to allow him to perform oral sex on her in July 2006."* (July 3, 2018).

Another article from the Washington Post read:

> *"Weinstein forcibly performed oral sex on a woman in July 2006, according to the new indictment. And, according to a criminal complaint, a New York City detective said that in 2004, Weinstein forced a woman to engage in oral sex with him."* (July 3, 2018).

All stories wrote that the oral sex was forced. However, "oral sex" can convey a degree of mutual consent and minimizes the seriousness of the acts. Reporters should instead write that, "The defendant forced her mouth on his penis."

Yet another word that undermines the gravity of the crime is using the word "molested" instead of "rape" or "sexual assault." Most of the time, the word "molested" is used to describe when a child has been assaulted or abused, hence the common phrase, "child molester."

An example from the NYT:

> *"Jurors in the Bill Cosby sexual assault retrial began their deliberations Wednesday, sifting through evidence they heard during 12 days of testimony and arguments in an effort to determine whether Andrea Constand had been molested by the once-popular entertainer"* (April 27, 2018).

Here's the problem: He gave her drugs, put her hand on his penis and touched her breasts and crotch. These euphemistic terms are perhaps the most problematic to describe sexual violence because it tends to hide the gravity of the crime.

6.2. Finding 2: Scepticism in reporting

It is disappointing that the media still perpetuates the myth that victims often lie about being raped when only 2–8% of rapes are falsely reported, the same percentage as for other felonies (CDC). This present study may be beneficial for future research by conducting examination of all types of crime and the corresponding levels of scepticism.

Words that signal scepticism towards the survivor include: *"alleged/allegedly," "accuser,"* and *"claim".* When the word "alleged" is actually searched on dictionary.com, the words "doubtful," "suspect," and "supposed" pop up. Again, it should be reiterated that sexual violence

crimes are the only ones treated with such scepticism (Hodgson & Kelley, 2001; ANROW, 2015).

An example from NY Time's reporting: op

> *"The onetime supermodel Janice Dickinson testified Thursday about allegedly being sexually assaulted by Cosby after he gave her a pill that he said would ease menstrual cramps."* (April 16, 2018).

At this point, several women had already come out to report their horrifying rapes and sexual assault by Mr. Cosby, so it would be acceptable to assume that omitting language like "allegedly" is acceptable. At the very least, labelling a victim/survivor as an "accuser" brings doubt. At its worst, it connotes an ulterior motive, mental illness, or even evil intent. It evokes a picture of pointed fingers, twists, and hidden agendas (Canaff, 2018). Leaving that word out does not imply anything besides that it is highly unlikely that she lied, as statistics and data on crime have shown (Fig. 2).

Most people who experience sexual violence are labelled as either "victims" or "survivors." It was not until I started the coding process that I noticed the word "accuser" pop up in word frequency searches. The word "accuser" was most prevalent in articles about Bill Cosby and then Harvey Weinstein. The word "accuser" has a history, dating back to witchcraft and "hysteria" that was apparently a specific quality in women.

An example from the NYT:

> *"The judge allowed five of Mr. Cosby's more than 50 accusers to testify, compared with one at the first trial"* (April 26, 2018).
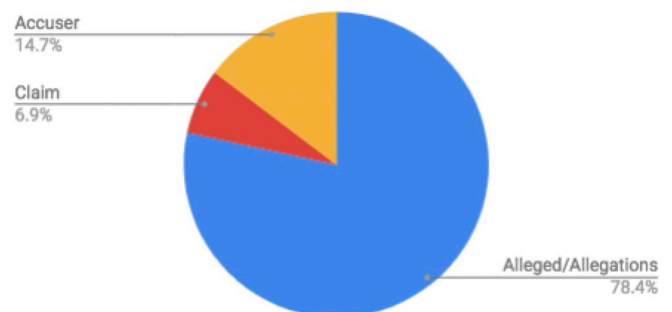
Scepticism in the articles

Fig. 2. Terms that portray scepticism in the news stories.

All 50 women share a similar narrative about their rapes: Cosby offers them a coffee or alcoholic drink, after which he rapes her while she's unconscious. A handful of other women have also accused him of drugging them without raping them, but grabbing or kissing them without drugging them. For decades, Cosby's victims said they did not speak out sooner because they felt they would not be believed due to rape myths and scepticism. Now that they have spoken out, the media still calls them "accusers." This may lead readers to form negative ideas that the victims are the ones doing something to the perpetrator. This kind of language may also contribute to victim blaming within laws and legislature.

For example, in 2011, Republican Representative Bobby Franklin introduced a bill to Georgia's criminal code that would label all victims of rape, stalking, or domestic violence as "accusers" until the defendant has been convicted. This only applies to sexual violence crimes—burglary, assault, and fraud victims are still "victims" (ANROWS 2017; Hodgson & Kelley, 2001).

Another example from the NY Times about Harvey Weinstein is:

"*Mr. Vance said the attempts by Mr. Weinstein and his legal team to undermine the legitimacy of his <u>accusers</u> fit with his past attempts to discredit women who complained about him. 'The defendant's recent assault on the integrity of the <u>survivors</u> and the legal process is predictable,' he said in the statement*" (May 30, 2018).

Here, an attorney was quoted saying the word "survivor," yet the writer decided to use the word "accuser." Again, at this point the media knew that dozens of victims had bravely come out and described how Weinstein raped, sexually assaulted or harassed them. Reporters remain overly cautious and unwilling to sympathise with victims.

6.3. Finding 3: Sympathy

The results showed that there are many references to the perpetrator's positive personality traits or how allegations against them "completely destroyed" their lives. This implies that the victim's perspective is often overlooked.

It's been previously found that particularly, in cases where the perpetrator is an athlete, articles describe men in the context of their sporting abilities. Further, the media chose protecting athlete reputations over the interests of women.

Example 1 Brock Turner from Washington Post: "*Turner, a <u>varsity swimmer and Olympic hopeful</u>, withdrew from the school, was banned from campus and was convicted of three felony counts of sexual assault*" (June 10, 2016).

Example 2 Cosby from NYT: "*Three years earlier, Mr. Cosby experienced his own <u>rush of accusations</u> that he had hidden a history of <u>mistreating women</u> behind his <u>comforting role as 'America's Dad.'</u> More than 50 women have accused Mr. Cosby– <u>once a beloved entertainer</u> – of drugging and sexually assaulting them*" (March 7, 2018).

There are numerous problems from these excerpts. In the first example, readers may feel sympathy for Brock Turner that he had to go through all these things when his future was so bright. The second is even worse; the writer focuses on the fact that Cosby had a *"rush"* of accusations as if they spontaneously occurred on their own. The writer also mentions how much he used to be loved for his *"comforting"* role and that he was even *"America's dad."* Fourth, he didn't simply *"mistreat women;"* he drugged and raped them. Finally, he uses the words *"accusers"* and *"accused."*

6.4. Finding 4: Sensationalism

Words that portray sensationalism include: "scandal," "controversy/controversial," and "saga" (see Fig. 3). Scandal is defined as an outrageous wrongdoing, but it can also mean rumours or malicious gossip. Sexual violence becomes overpowered by words like those, which make the public believe it is more like a reality T.V. plot line, rather than a
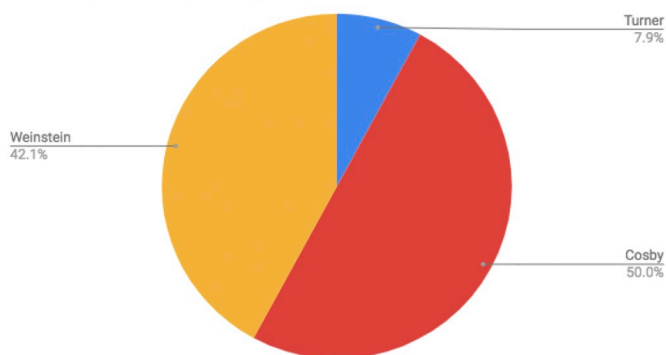
Fig. 3. Prominence of sensationalism in the news stories by case/perpetrator.

criminal act. While there were only 38 sensationalising terms, out of those, Cosby was described in the most sensationalised manner and Brock the least.

An example from the WP:

"*A Pennsylvania judge declared a mistrial Saturday after a jury was deadlocked on sexual-assault charges against Bill Cosby, the comic legend whose legacy as a promoter of wholesome values has been tarnished by a years-long sex and drugging <u>scandal.</u>*" (April 16, 2018).

Similarly, the term "controversial" is synonymous with "disputed," "under discussion," or "open to discussion." There is no reason why an act of sexual violence should be considered "controversial," if a murder or robbery is not as well. An example from the WP:

"*The allegations against Cosby are certainly <u>controversial</u>.*" (Nov. 30, 2014).

But are they?

6.5. Finding 5: Media frames (episodic vs. thematic)

This study began with the idea that there are two frames employed in news reporting: thematic or episodic. After open coding, it was discovered that thematic framing was more present in articles about Harvey Weinstein and Brock Turner than Bill Cosby. Out of the 195 articles, 30% were episodic and 67% were thematic (see Fig. 4). An interesting finding was that most articles published about Bill Cosby employed episodic frames, which means that the coverage focused on specific instances. Whereas, in articles about Weinstein and Turner, frames were thematic and focused on general ideas, like rape culture and victim blaming, statistical data or discussed rape as a societal problem (Baumgartner & McAdon, 2018) (Figs. 5–7).

Thematic Frame 1 *The Patriarchy Isn't Going Anywhere* (NYT): "*That paradigm shift will be critical to winning the coming battles for women's rights: health insurance, pay equity, family planning, sexual assault, and*
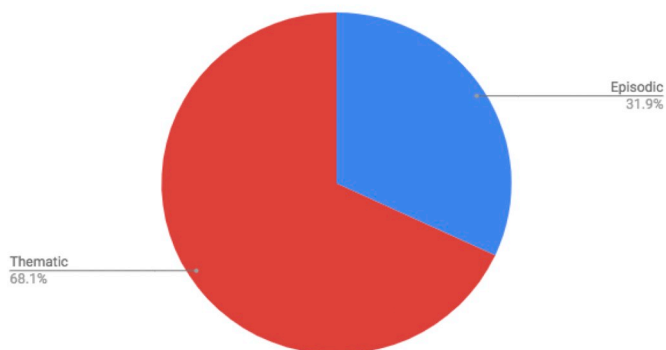
Fig. 4. Types of media frames employed in all news stories by percentage.
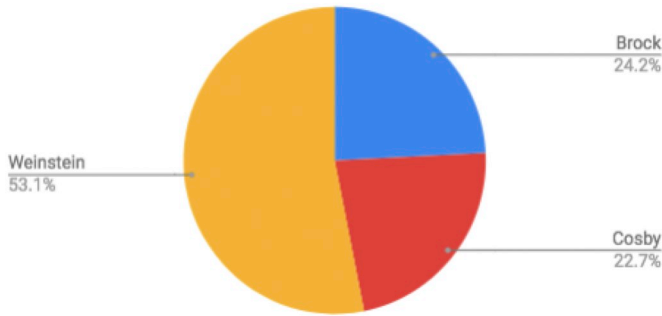
Thematic frame

Fig. 5. Thematic frames by case/perpetrator in percentage.

more. The peril is that activist women won't transcend the divide. In which case, #MeToo will continue to topple patriarchs, while the patriarchy continues to win the day" (December 31, 2017).

Thematic Frame 2 *Fraternities No Longer Have a Place on Campus (WP)*. It briefly mentions Brock Turner to illuminate how common rape cases are at fraternities and then proceeds: *"There is not a new epidemic of campus rape. It has been a serious problem for decades. Women are just finally speaking out about it now. It's time for universities to take an honest look at the value the current fraternity system brings to their campuses"* (September 16, 2016).

Previous research has found that people exposed to episodic coverage of poverty were less likely to support aid to the poor than people who saw "thematic" coverage. We may see a similar shift if news coverage of sexual assault continues to focus on sexual violence as a public health concern.

Most articles written about Bill Cosby's case focused on the prosecutors, jurors, and his wife, especially from the timeframe 2014–2015. In 2017, there were noticeably more articles that employed thematic themes. It's possible that discussions revolving around Turner and Weinstein inspired writers to re-hash Bill Cosby's case.

You can see the differences in stories by the headlines:

1. *(NYT, 2015) Bill Cosby: The Latest from His Accusers and Defenders*
2. *(WP, 2017): The new politics of being a celebrity: The public does the vetting*

6.6. Finding 6: Dominant frames (see Appendix 6)

During and after going through my data, I constructed four frames originally labelled, "victimized," "perpetrator," "factual," and "legal." However, after discovering that Bing and Lombardo constructed similar codes in their frame analysis, I used the four frames they employed:
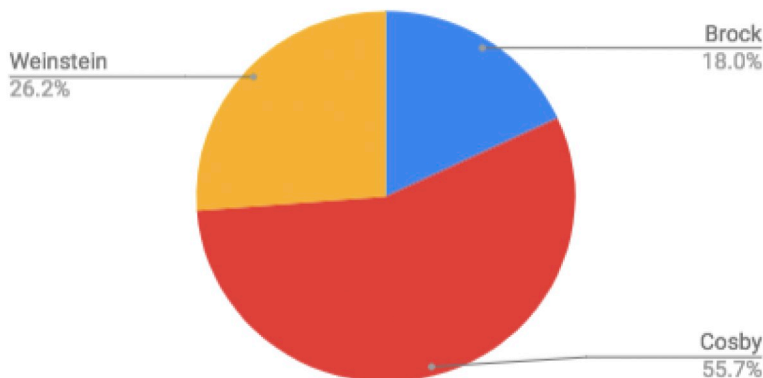

Fig. 7. Percentage of dominant frames utilized in all news stories.

Social Science Frame
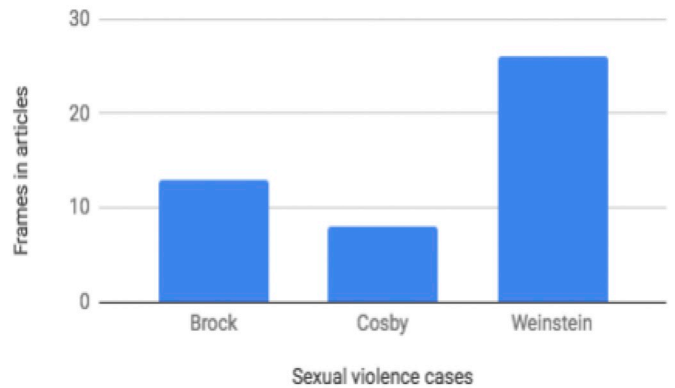
Fig. 8. The social science frame employed in all news stories by case/perpetrator.

judicial, initiator, victim, and social science.

1. **The initiator frame** implies that the behaviour is acceptable and focuses on the behaviour of perpetrators rather than damages to victim; it provides justifications. The initiator frame basically leads to inaction with regard to sexual violence.

Example 1 *"Many of the men in entertainment accused of misconduct have been stripped of their power - losing their companies, as in Weinstein's case, or being written out of reruns and future Hollywood deals, in actors' cases"*(May 27, 2018, WP).

Example 2 *"Cosby was on the verge of what appeared to be a comeback*

Episodic frame

Fig. 6. Episodic frames by case/perpetrator in percentage.

this year, but projects scheduled for NBC and Netflix have been postponed or cancelled in the <u>fallout</u>" (November 23, 2014, WP).

Example 3 "*He <u>lost his swimming scholarship</u> to Stanford and had to register as a sex offender in Ohio, his home state*" (December 3, 2017, NYT).

2. **The judicial frame** compares behaviours to legal policies or statutes; provides factual basis. Judicial frames suggest reactive strategies.

Example 1 "*There are many defenders of strict <u>statutes of limitation</u> who opposed the changes that have been made. In California, <u>under the old law</u>, charges could not be brought unless the reported incident of rape had occurred within 10 years*" (November 7, 2016, NYT).

Example 2 "*Each state has a different <u>legal standard</u> for presenting evidence about accusations that have not led <u>to indictments</u>, as do the different districts of the federal court system. But as a general rule, all states place limits on such <u>evidence</u> on the theory jurors might convict someone because they have a bad character rather than because <u>the evidence</u> proves they committed the crime in the actual indictment*" (June 25, 2018).

3. **The social science** frame is written in a way that the author is an objective observer; explores issue in more general and abstract way. It focuses on finding a shared definition of sexual violence/rape/sexual assault. It often reports data and research. The social science frame is the most well rounded approach because "it brings together different frames, which allows for changes in attitudes, knowledge, and legal grounds" (Bing & Lombardo, 2014).

Example 1 "*In last year's Kaiser Foundation poll, <u>20% of the women in college surveyed</u> said they were sexually assaulted over the course of four years. That's 1 in 5, the same number that the CDC came up with for the entire population*" (June 10, 2016, WP).

Example 2 "*The public discourse over rape today is different than it was five or 10 years ago. Today, women<u>, and society at large</u>, not only seek to utterly eradicate it but also to shame those who deny it or issue apologetics*" (July 15, 2015, WP).

4. **The victim frame** emphasise harm or injury to victim, offer sympathetic descriptions, descriptions of harmful behaviour, power differentials, reminders of penalties to victims; graphic details. The victim frame emphasizes prevention rather than punishment. The focus shifts to increasing personal and social understandings related to behaviours and conditions that enable sexual violence.

Example "*She didn't cry until later. Then her roommates took her home. 'And I didn't know what to do but just cry. I felt like my life had changed,' says Edwards, now 28.*" "<u>*This has haunted me my entire life,*</u>' *said Ms. Exiner d'Amore* (January 22, 2015, WP).

7. Discussion

This study examines how the U.S. media portrays sexual violence cases and its perpetrators and victims/survivors. Through a qualitative content analysis of two elite newspapers in the U.S., the study's main objectives were to identify themes and frames the media employ when they write about publicized sexual violence cases and whether or not they can contribute negatively to the public opinion on sexual assault, rape, and harassment. The time frame is from 2014 to 2018; a period where three heavily reported cases appeared in the media. While the news stories about sexual violence continue to show scepticism towards the victims, sympathise with perpetrators at times, and use euphemisms to describe the assaults, slight improvements can be noticed in the way stories are framed. The most interesting finding that is confirmed throughout the analysis is that the thematic frame is employed much more than previous years. Perhaps this is due to the #MeToo movement or maybe it goes back to Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump. Also

noteworthy is the finding that news stories of the past four years have been written in the social science frame more than any other frame, which focuses on finding solutions to the problem of sexual violence.

These results seem to support findings from framing theory that social or political context influences the media and that in turn, the media reflects policy. While public opinion of sexual violence cannot be tested in this study, the results suggest that organizations like RAINN and social movements (#MeToo and #TimesUp) may be responsible for the improvement in media reporting. The themes identified in media representations of sexual assault cases show that even if there have been efforts in the past four years to change certain laws and policies on sexual violence in the U.S., the media can do better. According to previous studies and the literature, the media has the power to affect public opinion, which can then be translated to public policy.

While the links of public opinion and representations of sexual violence cases were not tested in this study and cannot be confirmed, based on the literature and the data analysis, sceptical portrayals of sexual assault or rape victims can contribute to the public approaching victims with scepticism. Media representations of these cases may affect people's views on perpetrators and victims and sensationalised news stories may perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to rape culture.

The high levels of sexual harassment and sexual assault/rape have been addressed by policymakers (RAINN) NGOs, the CDC, and the media. To clearly understand the role of the media in sexual violence cases, further research is needed surrounding media coverage and its effects on rape culture and how this can lead to re-victimisation

This study shows that the main themes and keywords of the media portrayal of sexual violence cases and its perpetrators and victims, yet it has many limitations. The content analysis covered only two newspapers. More studies that examine other newspapers, other mediums (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, etc.), local sexual violence cases and perhaps a longitudinal study are needed for the generalization of these findings. It could have also looked into conservative versus liberal newspapers. It is important to note that the media treats rapists differently based on race and gender. Perhaps future research can focus on the fact that Bill Cosby is African-American and how it affects results. Also, this study utilized a qualitative analysis, which allowed a latent analysis and more subtle meanings. Other techniques like a quantitative content analysis could be used to test whether there is any statistically significant change in media frames since the #MeToo movement.
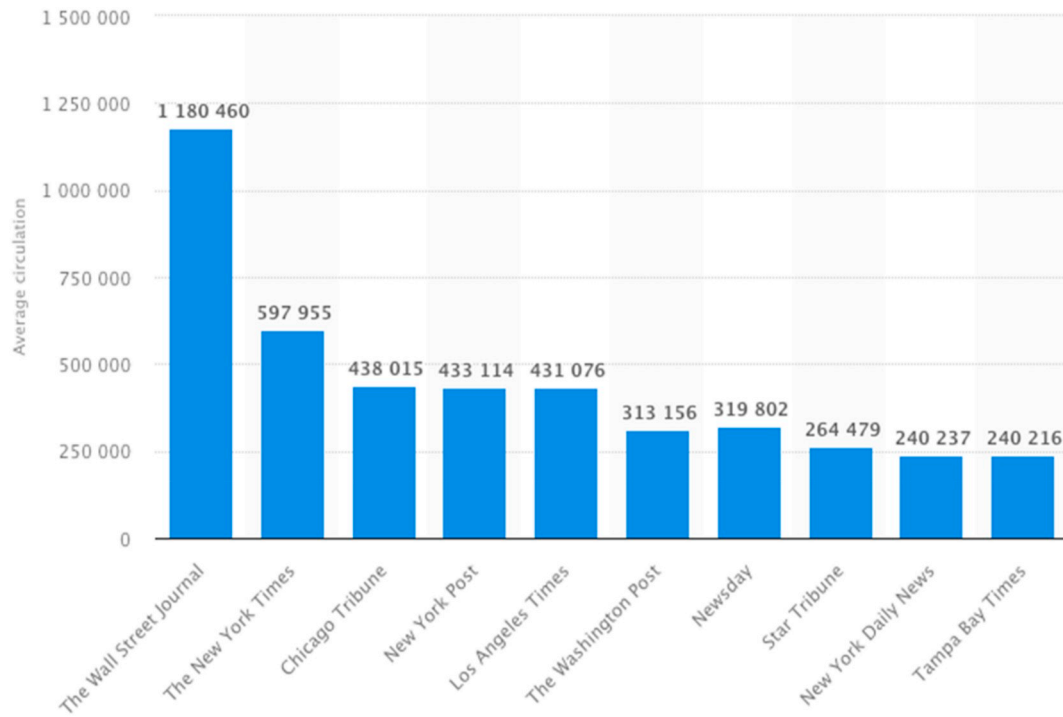
8. Conclusion

This study examined the media representation of sexual violence in the U.S. media, offering important findings about some keywords and frames of sexual violence portrayals. Findings were consistent with prior research on media and gender, that media representations consisted of scepticism, sympathy for the perpetrator, and euphemistic terms to describe sexual violence. This has a negative impact in how society relates with sexual assault/rape survivors. Compared to past and existing studies on sexual violence survivors and the media, this study provided a more in-depth and up-to-date look at changes that are either currently happening or will inevitably occur. By analysing news articles from the Washington Post and NY Times, it gave insight into how news reports have represented survivors of sexual violence and also perpetrators between 2014 and 2018. Similarly, media frames that portray sexual violence issues as human rights issues (utilizing the social science frame) can empower sexual assault victims. It is important to train reporters and journalists on how to fame sexual violence stories because this change could denote "rape culture" and promote a change in how we treat sexual violence in the world.

This study is important for several reasons. First, it looks at newspapers through a qualitative lens, which provides a more in-depth analysis. Second, it examines the use of ineffective language that the media currently employs. Third, this study provides a benchmark analysis, which can be used as a point of reference for future studies to

examine all sexual violence cases, qualitatively or quantitatively. The media plays a significant role in the debate on sexual harassment. They are responsible for how the allegations are characterized. Media influences both public attitudes and debate and the use of inaccurate language and conflicting frames adds to confusion about sexual violence. I hope that in identifying the problems with language surrounding sexual violence and dominant frames, it can clarify issues surrounding sexual violence. This study ultimately hopes to show the possibility of going from politics to policy.

Appendix 1. Word cloud

Appendix 2. Impact of the media on shaping social norms concerning sexual assault. (INSPQ, 2018)

Appendix 3. Articles analysed

Case	Turner	Cosby	Weinstein
No. of articles	46	65	84
Search terms	"Brock Turner AND rape AND sexual assault"	"Bill Cosby AND rape AND sexual assault"	"Harvey Weinstein AND rape AND sexual assault"
Search period	June 7, 2016–June 28, 2018	November 14, 2014–July 3, 2018	October 11, 2017–July 3, 2018

Appendix 4. Leading daily newspapers in the U.S. by circulation as of September 2017 (2018)

Appendix 5. Coding scheme for themes

Category	Person who experienced sexual violence described as:	Euphemistic language	Sensationalism	Scepticism	Sympathy towards perp.
Subcategory (keywords)	Victim	Encounter, engaged in, misconduct, molested, sex act, unwanted touching, inappropriate behaviour/touching	Saga	Allegedly, alleged, allegations, accuser, accused	Beloved
					Downfall/fall
	Survivor		Scandal		
					Legacy
			Controversial/ Controversy		
Definitions	Anytime the words "survivor" or "victim" was read, they were coded.	Anytime euphemistic words were read, they were coded.	Anytime words that sensationalised the sexual violence, they were coded.	Any words that signalled scepticism were coded.	Anything that seemed to imply sympathy towards the perpetrator was coded.
Mentions in Washington Post and NY Times (COMBINED AND TOTAL)	Survivor: 18				
	Victim: 175				
	Accuser (also used in scepticism category): 74	260 (33%)	38 (4%)	469 (59%)	17 (2%)

Appendix 6. Frame analysis coding scheme

Main category	Sub categories	Questions	Examples
Dominant frames	Judicial	Does it compare behaviours to legal policies or statutes; provides factual basis	"There have long been tensions between those who favour harsher sentencing for sex crimes and those who believe criminal justice reform should emphasise rehabilitation over punishment."
	Initiator	Does it imply the behaviour is acceptable and focuses on behaviour of perpetrator rather than damages to victim? Does it provide justifications?	"Cosby was on the verge of what appeared to be a comeback this year, but projects scheduled for NBC and Netflix have been postponed or cancelled in the fallout. Several of Cosby's upcoming comedy shows have been cancelled, when he took the stage Friday in Melbourne, Fla., he received a standing ovation from the sold-out crowd."
		Does it emphasise harm or injury to victim, sympathetic descriptions,	

Victim	descriptions of harmful behaviour, power differentials, reminders of penalties to victims? Are there graphic details?		"The 23-year-old victim read her own statement in court, recounting the horror of finding out details of her attack on the news (she had been intoxicated and could not remember the assault) and having to break the news to her family."
Social Science	Is the author objective? Does it explore issue in more general and abstract way? Does it tend to focus on problem of finding shared definition of sexual harassment? Does it reference prevalence and incidence? Does it report data and research?		"But in 2015, a study of 1642 men at two different colleges was published in JAMA Pediatrics and found that while a larger number of men admitted to behaviours that constituted rape, a smaller percentage of them, closer to 25%, were repeat offenders."

Appendix 7

Media frames	Bill Cosby	Harvey Weinstein	Brock Turner
Thematic	29 (46%)	68 (80%)	31 (75%)
Episodic	33 (62%)	16 (19%)	11 (26%)

Appendix 8

Media guide title	Authors	Country
Use the Right Words: Media Reporting on Sexual Violence in Canada	Femifesto	Canada
Media representations of violence against women and their children: State of knowledge paper	Australia's National Research Organization for Women's Safety	Australia
Reporting on Sexual Violence: A Guide For Journalists	Minnesota Coalition against sexual assault	United States
Reporting on Sexual Violence: A Guide for Maine Journalists	Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault	United States

References

Allison, J., & Wrightsman, L. (1995). *Rape, the misunderstood crime*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.

An, S., & Gower, K. (2009). How do the news media frame crises? A content analysis of crisis news coverage. *Public Relations Review, 35*(2), 107–112.

Ardèvol-Abreu, A. (2015). Framing theory in communication research. Origins, development and current situation in Spain. *Revista Latina de Comunicacion Social, 70*, 423–450. https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2015-1053.

Babbie, E. (1992). *The practice of social research*. Belmont: Wadsworth.

Basit, T. (2003). The role of coding in qualitative data analysis. *Educational Research, 45*(2), 143–154.

R. Baumgartner, F. and McAdon, S. (2018). [online] Washington Post. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/11/theres-been-a-big-change-in-how-the-news-media-cover-sexual-assault/?utm_term=.ae4e3e066730 [Accessed 1 Sep. 2018].

Benedict, H. (1992). *Virgin and vamp*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Berns, N. (2004). *Framing the victim: Domestic violence*. Media, and Social Problems.

Bing, J., & Lombardo, L. (1997). Talking past each other about sexual harassment: An exploration of frames for understanding. *Discourse & Society, 8*(3), 293–311.

Boswell, A., & Spade, J. (1996). Fraternities and collegiate rape culture. *Gender & Society, 10*(2), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124396010002003.

Campbell, R., & Raja, S. (1999). Secondary victimization of rape victims: Insights from mental health professionals who treat survivors of violence. *Violence and Victims, 14*(3), 261–275. https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.14.3.261.

Canaff, R. (2018). Accuser: Simply the wrong word - Roger Canaff. [online]. Available at Roger Canaff https://rogercanaff.com/2010/06/accuser-simply-the-wrong-word/, Accessed date: 21 August 2018.

Cho, J., & Lee, E. (2018). Reducing confusion about grounded theory and qualitative content analysis: Similarities and differences. *19*, 32.

Classen, C., Palesh, O., & Aggarwal, R. (2005). Sexual revictimization. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 6*(2), 103–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838005275087.

Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: A user-friendly guide for social scientists*. Routledge.

Dickson, D. (1994). Understanding media Bias: The press and the U.S. invasion of Panama. *Journalism Quarterly, 71*(4), 809–819.

Druckman, J. (2001). The implications of framing effects for citizen competence. *Northwestern Scholars, (3)*, 23.

Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 62*(1), 107–115.

Entman, R. (1989). How the media affect what people think: An information processing approach. *The Journal of Politics*.

Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*.

Entman, R. (2010). Media framing biases and political power: Explaining slant in news of Campaign 2008. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism, 11*(4), 389–408.

femifesto. (2018). Use the right words - Femifesto. [online] Available at: http://www.femifesto.ca/media-guide/use-the-right-words/ [Accessed 21 Aug. 2018].

Franiuk, R., Seefelt, J., Cepress, S., & Vandello, J. (2008). Prevalence and effects of rape myths in print journalism. *Violence Against Women, 14*(3), 287–309.

Fraser, B., & Brown, W. (2002). Media, celebrities, and social influence: Identification with Elvis Presley. *Mass Communication and Society, 5*(2), 183–206.

Goffman, E. (1977). Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience. *Frame Analysis and Communication*.

Grady, C. (2017). The complicated, inadequate language of sexual violence. [online] Vox. Available at: https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/11/30/16644394/language-sexual-violence [Accessed 21 Aug. 2018].

Harvey, M. (2018). *Celebrity influence*.

Help-nv10.qsrinternational.com. (2018). NVivo 10 for windows help. [online] Available at: http://help-nv10.qsrinternational.com/desktop/concepts/about_nodes.htm [Accessed 1 Sep. 2018].

Hlavka, H. (2014). Normalizing sexual violence. *Gender & Society, 28*(3), 337–358.

Hodgson, J., & Kelley, D. (2001). *Sexual Violence: Policies, Practices, and Challenges in the United States and Canada: Policies, Practices and Challenges in the United States and Canada*. Willow Tree Press.

Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288.

https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/19024317/Compass-Violence-against-women-in-Australia-Additional-analysis-of-t...-1.pdf.

https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/16000450/2017-NCAS-ATSI-Sub-Report.pdf.

https://www.cdc.gov/.

https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/summaryreports.html.

INSPQ. (2018). Sexual assault and the media | INSPQ. [online] Available at: https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/sexual-assault/media/sexual-assault-and-media#ref [Accessed 21 Aug. 2018].

Iyengar, S. (1996). Framing responsibility for political issues. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 546*(1), 59–70.

Iyengar, S., Peters, M., & Kinder, D. (1982). Experimental demonstrations of the "not-so-minimal" consequences of television news programs. *The American Political Science Review, 76*(4), 848.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, Values, and Frames. *American Psychologist, 39*, 341–350.

Kitzinger, J. (2001). Representing and consuming women. In K. Ross (Ed.). *Women and media: International perspectives*. Blackwell.

Kitzinger, J. (2004). *Framing abuse*. London: Pluto Press.

Kracauer, S. (1952). The challenge of qualitative content analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 16*(4, Special Issue on International Communications Research), 631.

Lasswell, H. (1927). The theory of political propaganda. *American Political Science Review, 21*(3), 627–631.

Lewis, J., et al. (2014). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. SAGE.

Lippmann, W. (1921). *Public opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Loya, R. (2014). The role of sexual violence in creating and maintaining economic insecurity among asset-poor women of color - Rebecca M. Loya, 2014. [online] Journals.sagepub.com. Available at: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801214552912 [Accessed 22 Aug. 2018].

Matthes, J., & Kohring, M. (2008). The content analysis of media frames: Toward improving reliability and validity. *Journal of Communications*.

Mays, N., & Pope, C. (1995). Qualitative research: Rigour and qualitative research. *BMJ,*

311(6997), 109–112.

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

Mcleer, A. (1998). Saving the victim: Recuperating the language of the victim and re-assessing global feminism. *Hypatia, 13*(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1998.tb01351.x.

Morse, J., & Field, P. (1996). *Qualitative research methods for health professionals.* Thousand Oaks [u.a.]: Sage Publications.

Mukhopadhyay, S. (2008). Trial by media: Black female lasciviousness and the question of consent. In J. Friedman, & J. Valenti (Eds.). *Yes means yes: Visions of female power and a world without rape* (pp. 151–162). Berkeley, CA: Seal.

Neal, A. (2015). In Undergraduate. Ohio State University (Ed.). *The role of euphemisms in language comprehension: The taboo topic of rape*.

Nelson, T., & Kinder, D. (1996). Issue frames and group-centrism in american public opinion. *The Journal of Politics, 58*(4), 1055–1078 JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2960149.

Nelson, T. E., Oxley, Z. M., & Clawson, R. A. (1997). *Political Behavior, 19*, 221. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024834831093.

Nwabueze, C., & Oduah, F. (2015). Media re-victimization of rape victims in a shame culture? Exploring the framing and representation of rape cases in Nigerian dailies. *Global Media Journal,* (24), 13. Retrieved from http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/media-revictimization-of-rape-victims-in-a-shame-culture-exploring-the-framing-and-representation-of-rape-cases-in-nigerian-dailies.pdf.

Ogundola, O. (2013). *Framing disability: A content analysis of newspapers in Nigeria.* Master'sSyracuse University.

O'Hara, S. (2012). Monsters, playboys, virgins and whores: Rape myths in the news media's coverage of sexual violence. *Language and Literature, 21*(3), 247–259.

Palazzolo, K., & Roberto, A. (2011). Media representations of intimate partner violence and punishment preferences: Exploring the role of attributions and emotions. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 39*(1), 1–18.

Perry Undem (2017). Report on sexism, harassment, culture, and equality. [online] Available at: https://www.scribd.com/document/366406592/PerryUndem-Report-on-Sexism-Harassment-Culture-And-Equality-compressed [Accessed 21 Aug. 2018].

Peters, M., & Besley, T. (2019). Weinstein, sexual predation, and "Rape Culture": Public pedagogies and Hashtag Internet activism. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*.

Protess, D., & McCombs, M. (1991). *Agenda setting: Readings on media, public opinion, and policymaking.* Routledge.

Rainn.org. (2018). RAINN | the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. [online] Available at: https://www.rainn.org/ [Accessed 21 Aug. 2018].

Reese, S., & Danielian, L. (1989). *Communication Campaigns About Drugs: Government, Media and the Public*.

Sacks, M., Ackerman, A. R., & Shlosberg, A. (2018). Rape myths in the media: A content analysis of local newspaper reporting in the United States. *Deviant Behavior, 39*(9), 1237–1246.

Saunders, B., et al. (2017). Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality and Quantity*.

Scheufele, D. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication, 49*(1), 103–122.

Scheufele, D., & Tewksbury, D. (2006). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 9–20.

Schreier, M. (2013). *Qualitative content analysis in practice.* London: SAGE.

Schreier, M. (2014). Ways of doing qualitative content analysis: Disentangling terms and terminologies. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research [Online], 15*(1) n. pag. Web. 28 Oct. 2019.

Schuldt, J., & Roh, S. (2014). Media frames and cognitive accessibility: What do "global warming" and "climate change" evoke in partisan minds? *Environmental Communication, 8*(4), 529–548.

Schwark, S. (2017). Visual representations of sexual violence in online news outlets. *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*, 774. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00774.

Serisier, T. (2017). Sex crimes and the media. *Oxford research encyclopedia of criminology and criminal justice*.

Sherwyn, D., & Wagner, P. (2018). We can thank Harvey Weinstein for doing what congress and the supreme court failed to do. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*.

Springer, S., & Harwood, J. (2014). The influence of episodic and thematic frames on policy and group attitudes: Mediational analysis. *Human Communication Research, 41*(2), 226–244.

Thomson, K. (2018). Social media activism and the #MeToo movement – Katie Thomson – Medium. [online] Available at: https://medium.com/@kmthomson.11/social-media-activism-and-the-metoo-movement-166f452d7fd2 [Accessed 1 Sep. 2018].

Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1981). The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice. *Science, 211*(4481), 453–458.

Vogelman, L. (1990). *The sexual face of violence.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Watts, M., Domke, D., Shah, D., & Fan, D. (1999). Elite cues and media bias in presidential campaigns. *Communication Research, 26*(2), 144–175.

Williams, W., Shapiro, M., & Cutbirth, C. (1983). The impact of campaign agendas on perceptions of issues in 1980 campaign. *Journalism Quarterly, 60*(2), 226–231.

Wimmer, R., & Dominick, J. (2006). *Mass media research.* Belmont, CA: Thomson, Wadsworth.

Wood, J. (1994). Gendered media: The influence of media on views of gender. Living with media. [online] Available at: https://www1.udel.edu/comm245/readings/GenderedMedia.pdf [Accessed 21 Aug. 2018].