

Examining Newspaper Reports about Sexual Violence

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Violence against women, particularly sexual violence, is not a new phenomenon. However, recent years have seen a relative increase in education programs and awareness around sexual violence – what it entails, whom it affects, the impact it has, and how individual incidents relate to society as a whole (DeGue, Fowler, and Randall 2014). Both as a result of and as a contributor to the increased awareness around sexual violence against women, there seems to be greater news media coverage of the issue – covering specific, high-profile cases and covering the issue at a community or societal level (Lowenstein 2014).

When looking at sexual violence in society and how it is reported in the media, gender is a key factor. Gender is a complex social construct that influences social structures and institutions, with gender inequality existing across institutions (Ferree 2010; Risman 2004). Those gender inequalities have become so engrained as to feel natural, and as a result, many social institutions perpetuate those inequalities (Ferree 2010; Risman 2004). Sexual violence is one example of how engrained gender inequalities manifest across multiple social institutions, including mass media (Ferree 2010; Risman 2004).

Mass media is an important social institution that is influenced by and can influence gender and gender inequality (Ferree 2010; Risman 2004). Media has the power to break gender stereotypes and reduce inequality or to maintain the status quo of gender inequality (Risman 2004). As such, there is an obligation on media outlets to use that power responsibly, especially when it comes to issues as sensitive as sexual violence (Black 1995). Research has shown that there are a number of ways that the way in which news media reports incidents of sexual assault – from word choice, to verb tense, to the types of details included, to the underlying message – can affect how audiences view the specific incident and the issue at large, whether deliberately or

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not (Anastasia and Costa 2004; Berns 2001; Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff 2008; Esteal, Bartels, and Bradford 2012; Franuik, Seefeldt, and Vandello 2008; Henly, Miller, and Beazley 1995; Hollander and Rodgers 2014; Lamb and Keon 1995; Schwengels and Lemart 1986; Weimann and Gabor 1987; Wilcox 2005).

The existing research shows a connection between specific written components and perceptions of sexual violence, but there is a need for more research on how the discussion of specific incidents of sexual violence connect to the issue of gender inequality in society (Anastasia and Costa 2004; Berns 2001; Carlyle et al. 2008; Esteal et al. 2012; Franuik et al. 2008; Henly et al. 1995; Hollander and Rodgers 2014; Lamb and Keon 1995; Schwengels and Lemart 1986; Weimann and Gabor 1987; Wilcox 2005). With increasing public awareness around sexual violence and increased media coverage, it is important that the issue and individual incidents of sexual violence are reported in a responsible way that accurately represents the incident, avoids re-victimizing or blaming the victim, and addresses how individual incidents are influenced by and can influence society as a whole. Because the local news outlets may be the primary source of information about sexual violence for a share of the population, the responsibility of the news source is critical as their reports can help shape the audience's perspective on the incident of sexual violence discussed as well as the overall issue of sexual violence against women in society (Mejia, Somji, Nixon, Dorfman, and Quintero 2015).

Through content analysis of newspaper articles before and after three important societal milestones related to sexual violence against women in 1972, 1994, and 2009, I examine the ways that articles within a local newspaper discuss sexual violence and if incidents of sexual violence are contextualized in the greater societal discussion of sexual violence and gender inequality. I find that articles on incidents of sexual violence have become less sensitive to

victims over time and do little to connect sexual violence to gender inequality in society, perpetuating said inequality and bias against victims of sexual assault.

Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines sexual violence as any sexual act committed by a perpetrator without the victim's consent or when the victim cannot give consent, up to and including rape (Basile et al. 2014). As of 2013, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's definition of rape includes any kind of penetration of the anus or vagina by an object or body part of another person without the victim's consent (Office of the Attorney General 2012). According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), sexual violence disproportionately affects women – about 20% of women in the United States and about 2% of men are victims of rape or attempted rape by someone at some point in their lives. Even more telling, more than two-in-five women and nearly one-in-four men have experienced other kinds of sexual violence during their lifetimes (Basile et al. 2014). Despite these numbers, it is understood there are most likely more victims of sexual assault that are not reported during the data collection due to the sensitive nature of the subject and reliance on victim self-report (Basile et al. 2014).

Incidents of sexual violence are not a single moment in the lives of the victims, as there are often long-term effects. The CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention (2014) note that there are both short-term and long-term effects, such as injury or post-traumatic stress disorder, respectively, related to sexual violence: more than one-quarter of women in the United States and more than one-tenth of men “have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner and

reported significant short- or long-term impacts.” The data reflect an important issue that affects a disproportionate number of women in society with consequences that last a lifetime.

Theoretical Perspectives

Gender is a lifelong process of performed behavior that is influenced by and reinforces social structures (Ferree 1990, 2010). According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is not something that is or a person has – gender is something every individual does through their interactions with others every day; gender is a social construct. However, gender is not a single institution or facet of an institution but an inequality that exists across institutions (Ferree 2010; Risman 2004). “Doing gender” does not just exist at the microsocial interpersonal level (Ferree 2010). Gender is in itself a complex social structure that is interconnected between the gendered individual, the interactional norms of society, and greater institutional regulations (Risman 2004). Inequalities are created and reinforced at all three levels, and the multidimensional structure model enables examinations into how social change happens at each level (Risman 2004).

When looking at how gender inequalities are created based on embodied cultural expectations, particularly as it relates to reporting on sexual assault, one can investigate the social processes of status expectations, cognitive bias, othering, and alter casting (Risman 2004). In every day interactions, the status expectations that exist based on gender can include ideas that women have less to contribute to society than men, and as such, these status expectations perpetuate the status quo that leads to gender inequality (Ridgeway 1993; Risman 2004). Despite the fact that most people would rationally argue that such status expectations are inaccurate, they can still lead to cognitive biases that lead to judgments based on these perceived inequalities

based on gender (Risman 2004). Othering is a strategy, whether intentional or subliminal, used by a dominant societal group – men in the case of sex – to define the non-dominant group as subordinate, different, and less than the dominant group (Risman 2004; Schwalbe et al. 2000). Finally, altercasting is a strategy to persuade people to behave in a certain way by forcing them into a certain social role (Risman 2004). For example, perpetuating ideas by telling a woman that as a wife and mother, she should stay at home with the children instead of working. Women are more inclined to behave a certain way within the confines of the social role that society, men in particular, have placed on them through status expectations, cognitive bias, and othering (Ridgeway 1993; Risman 2004; Schwalbe et al. 2000).

One of the primary ways gendered messages are shared and received is through the media. Mass media plays a huge role in the lives of individuals, and as such, media, especially news media, holds a great deal of power in its ability to influence how individuals see the world as a whole, as well as how they view specific issues (Anastasio and Costa 2004; Hollander and Rodgers 2014; Kasdan, Saxton, and Tavernetti 1998). Potter (2011) defines ‘mass media’ as all of the organizations that deliver messages through technological outlets in order to attract a continuously growing audience that is conditioned to return to the outlet to receive these messages again and again.

As individuals are socialized to the world, language plays an important role. Language has the power to shape how individuals view the world and how they perceive reality (Esteal, Bartles, and Bradford 2012; Lamb and Keon 1995). Media has the ability to frame language in a way that can influence how audiences interpret the language and understand the message being shared, and the more often language around an issue is framed in a certain way, the greater the chances that the audience will interpret it in that way and adopt that viewpoint (Carlyle, Slater,

and Chakroff 2008). As with other aspects of society and performance, language both influences the dominant beliefs and values of society and is greatly influenced by the dominant beliefs and values, so the reality that is constructed reflects and impacts those dominant ideas (Esteal et al. 2012).

Similarly, media can both influence and reinforce the status quo. As male values dominate in society, this means the media can contribute to or counter gender stereotypes and discrimination (Hassan, Raza, and Khan 2014; Lamb and Keon 1995; Watkins and Emerson 2000). Specifically, Gerbner (1972) suggested that media representation is ‘symbolic representation’ in that it portrays society’s values and ideals. That leads to two contrasting theories related to the role of media in society regarding sex and gender: symbolic annihilation and the reflection hypothesis. The first, symbolic annihilation, describes how certain groups are absent from or underrepresented in media depictions and is often used to maintain existing social inequalities (Tuchman 1979; Watkins and Emerson 2000). The reflection hypothesis, on the other hand, suggests that the media acts as a mirror, reflecting the real-world values and beliefs of society (Tuchman 1979; Watkins and Emerson 2000).

Symbolic annihilation of women in media does not allow for or severely limits accurate representations of women in the media, while the reflection hypothesis can be damaging if audiences believe male-generated depictions of women as a true reflection of reality. Media will include the kinds of issues that the public views as relevant and important, and the public will view them as relevant and important because they were highlighted by the media (Anastasio and Costa 2004). These media representations, especially news media, are an important components used by members of the public as they construct their reality and viewpoint around these important issues, including sexual violence and violence against women (Berns 2001).

Media Responsibility and Constraints

According to Carlyle and colleagues (2008), both individual behavior and public policy can be affected by media coverage (Carlyle et al. 2008). As such, the media has an enormous responsibility. Black (1995) argues that the news media and journalists have ethical standards to not only report true and accurate information, but they also have an ethical responsibility to be compassionate to those about whom they are reporting to reduce the possible amount of harm that could come from the process as possible. However, as journalists are also humans living in a society, they are subject to the same societal factors that influence how all of us approach the world and the issues that arise (Black 1995). It is important to note that the process of gathering and distributing information for a news story is not an infallible process, nor is any focus of the mass media on particular issues (Hassan Raza and Kahn 2014).

The idea of journalistic ethics and media responsibility comes into even greater focus when discussing reporting on criminal cases, because the balance of reporting accurate information and the idea of minimizing any harm that would be caused becomes much harder to achieve, and this balance becomes even more difficult to manage when discussing sexual violence cases (Black 1995). In addition to the ethical dilemmas related to reporting on cases of sexual violence, there are general constraints to news work that must be taken into account. Journalism is a business with corresponding economic pressures and time deadlines, so reporters prioritize “newsworthy” items that are often more sensationalized than other stories (Hollander and Rodgers 2014). In addition to this sort of bias toward sensationalism, reporters are part of the public and, as such, subject to draw on the same values and beliefs about the social world that are

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considered norms. (Hollander and Rodgers 2014). Lamb and Keon (1995) highlighted that it is a good thing that reporters are often under attack for any biases that may creep into their writing given their highly influential role in shaping the opinions of the public because it provides some additional accountability for journalists to report as fairly and neutrally as possible.

How Media Influences Perceptions of Sexual Assault

According to Weimann and Gabor (1987), there is a history of criticism around how the news media reports on crime by overemphasizing violent crime, taking only surface-level looks at criminological issues, sensationalizing offenses, reinforcing stereotypes of victims and perpetrators, and giving priority to coverage of newsworthy events. The various aspects of violent crimes – what it means to be a victim, what it means to be a perpetrator, what constitutes a random act of violence, what it means to be violent, etc. – have become social constructs that are defined and interpreted in specific ways for specific ends (Hollander and Rodgers 2014), so it is important to understand how these factors come into play around reporting of sexual assault cases.

Language is a critical component of how crimes, especially sexually violent crimes, are reported. As language can shape how individuals see the world, language can shape how individuals view the actors involved in a news story about a criminal case. The literature suggests several ways in which language may be used, intentionally or not, to influence perceived responsibility in news reports about violence against women: 1) using passive voice 2) using the couple as the agent; 3) obfuscating gender; 4) describing the non-consensual acts as consensual; 5) framing the assault; 6) providing certain details of the assault; and 7) using “rape myths”.

Passive Voice. One of the common elements in reporting is the use of passive over active voice, which can change how readers understand the content (Henly, Miller, and Beazley 1995). Passive voice places the object of the sentence as the primary actor, while the subject is not named (in truncated passive voice) or included only in a phrase “by so-and-so” (Henly et al. 1995). Passive voice, especially truncated passive voice is used frequently in journalistic writing, especially when writing about crime, because it implies some neutrality toward the actors in the article and easily allows for writing about cases when the perpetrator of the crime is unknown or “alleged” (Lamb and Keon 1995). However, studies have shown that verb voice helps the reader understand the causal roles of the actors involved and can influence who they view as the responsible party and to what degree (Lamb and Keon 1995). For example, passive voice obscures the agency of the subject, or main actor of the sentence (Henly et al. 1995), so when reading about a crime written in the passive voice, the reader reflects on what has been done to the victim but not as much about the perpetrator who caused the crime (Lamb and Keon 1995). Rape, in particular, is often written about in the truncated passive voice, and a study by Henly, Miller, and Beazley (1995) shows that male readers are especially influenced by the use of passive voice when reading about violence against women – they tended to attribute less harm to the victim and less blame on the perpetrator when the story was written in passive voice. Female readers, on the other hand, were less affected by verb voice (Henly et al. 1995).

Couple as Agent. Language such as “the pair fought” or “they engaged in sexual behavior” is using the couple as the agent of the action as opposed to “he hit” or “he assaulted” which describes an individual taking action. Using language that describes both parties as the agent of an assault implies shared responsibility between the parties involved, despite the fact that there is a perpetrator and a victim (Lamb and Keon 1995). This can do two things to mitigate

the blame of the perpetrator and to affect society's understanding of the gender inequality at play regarding sexual assault. Using the agent as a couple degenders the issue, so men and women are more or less equal as agents (Lamb and Keon 1995). Degendering the issue implies first, that sexual and domestic violence affect women but actually impact men and women equally and suggests that women are just as violent as men, despite the fact that sexual and domestic violence disproportionately affects women and men are more often the perpetrators (Berns 2001; Lamb and Keon 1995).

Obfuscation of Gender. Using non-gender specific pronouns is not the only word choice that can influence the reader's amount of empathy for and blame on the victim, especially if the victim is female (Anastasio and Costa 2004). Use of terms, such as "the victim" and "the perpetrator", obscures the genders of the parties involved in a sexual assault incident and who is responsible (Lamb and Keon 1995). As with using the couple as the agent, degendering the issue in this way suggests inaccurate proportionality between the genders as victims of violence and sexual assault (Berns 2001; Lamb and Keon 1995).

Descriptions of the Non-Consensual Acts. How specific word choice influences the audience's empathy for the victim is not limited to identifying the parties involved, but it also includes how the specific acts are described. Due to limited words in the English language to describe sexual acts, along with myths about rape that are deep-rooted in society, there are situations of sexual violence in which non-consensual acts are described using the same terms as one would use to describe consensual sex, for example: 'fondling', 'engage in sexual intercourse', or 'brief touching' (Esteal et al. 2012). These types of "erotic or affection-laden terms" are often opposed to what the victim actually experienced, so this sort of language

minimizes the violence of the act and leads to the reader “maintaining a ‘reality’ alternative to that of the victim” (Esteal et al. 2012).

Framing of the Assault. As Weimann and Gabor (1987) share, how the media depict the actors in a violent situation and who is responsible – the victim and the perpetrator – is critical in defining how the public views those sorts of crimes and what society can do about them.

According to Wilcox (2005), the perceived innocence of a victim in news reports about sexual violence are often linked to how the women are represented, specifically, the idea that innocence is associated with purity, decency, ordinariness, and vulnerability among women. Alternately, violence is affiliated with the notion of masculinity; however, in violence against women with male perpetrators, the focus tends to turn on the innocence, or lack thereof, of the female victim instead of the guilt of the male assailant (Wilcox 2005).

Higher shares of blame are placed on female victims who are attacked in what could be perceived as precarious situations, demonstrate a willingness to drink alcohol or consume illicit drugs, or had consensual sexual contact at another time or for another act (Esteal et al. 2004). For example, in news reports that depict intimate partner violence, the situation is framed, so the responsibility of ending the violence is on the victim to leave (Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff 2008). Similarly, when a female is framed as the victim of a perpetrator’s obsession, the victim again becomes the reason for the violence by being the object of said obsession (Anastasio and Costa 2004). This becomes even more apparent when the word ‘accuser’ is used instead of ‘victim’ or ‘alleged victim. Using the word ‘accuser’ in reports may bias the reader against the victim because the ‘accuser’ becomes the actor in the incident instead of the perpetrator who committed the crime (Franuik et al. 2008). In cases where the victim is the focus, any discussion of perpetrators tends to be on the specific perpetrator, not a larger discussion of the societal

factors that allow for the systemic violence against women to occur, which allows for the status quo remains (Anastasio and Costa 2004; Carlyle et al. 2008).

Details of the Assault. The types of news reports about sexual and domestic violence may not always reflect the reality that is found in police reports (Schwengles and Lemart 1986). For example, according to Hollander and Rodgers (2014), news reports would have one believing that when women are assaulted, it is usually by a male stranger in a public place, and after the assault, the victim is helpless and in need of male support. Newspaper articles are more likely to report on sexual assault incidents that follow this pattern – the perpetrator is a stranger to the victim, force was used, the initial contact happened outside the home, and, in a slight deviation, the victim is a student (Schwengels and Lemart 1986). Similarly, Franuik, Seefeldt, and Vandello (2008) suggest that the more the victim can describe their assaults as “violent attack by a stranger”, the more believable and sympathetic they are. Even if additional details are included in the police report, newspapers are less likely to report whether the victim tried to resist the assault or protect herself, whether there were witnesses nearby, whether the victim was injured in some way, the victim’s race, and any information about the perpetrator, unless he is under 35, in which age may be shared (Schwengels and Lemart 1986). Hollander and Rodgers (2014) note whether or how women tried to resist their attackers in cases of sexual violence are rarely reported, and only a small share of news reports depict women as competent and able to defend themselves.

Also woefully underreported, at least according to Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff (2008), is alcohol and drug use in cases of intimate partner violence. The share of news reports about intimate partner violence that mention alcohol or drug use is much smaller than the epidemiological estimates of incidents in which there was some substance use. The fact that reports of female self-defense and drug and alcohol use related to violent crimes are only

discussed in an episodic framing, they appear to be the exception instead of the norm. This means that the lack of accurate reports not only skew how the public understands the risk related to those the ability for a woman to fight back against an attacker, but they are not discussed within the full social context, so discussion of big-picture, societal solutions to the underlying issues are difficult (Carlyle et al. 2008; Hollander and Rodgers 2014).

Rape Myths. The differing realities between the actual assault and the media version may also be purported by the use of “rape myths” in news reports about sexual violence (Franuik et al. 2008). Rape myths are the false, though commonly held, ideals that suggest an incident of sexual violence did not take place (Franuik et al. 2008). According to Franuik, Seefeldt, and Vandell (2004), the common rape myths are that the victim is lying about being sexually assaulted, the victim did something to deserve it, the victim asked to be assaulted in some way, the perpetrator is excused because he wasn’t able to stop himself, the perpetrator isn’t the kind of person who would do such a thing, or the sexual assault is trivial or a natural part of life. While reporters may not use these rape myths intentionally, they are often the base reaction to sexual violence as self-protective measures – they suggest it is possible for a woman to prevent herself from being sexually assaulted, the perpetrators are just particularly bad men, and rape is not all that serious anyway (Franiuk et al. 2008).

Here, I set out to examine several issues. I look first at verb voice; then I turn to degendering of the victim or perpetrator; then descriptions of non-consensual sex acts using consensual terms; then I look at the details provided about the victim and the assault; and then I turn to the use of specific “rape myths”. Finally, I explore whether specific sexual assault incidents are contextualized into the broader societal discussion of sexual violence and gender inequality.

Methods

Content analysis was used to examine the use of language in newspaper articles reporting on cases of sexual violence before and immediately succeeding the following legislative milestones: the passage of Title IX in 1972, the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, and the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act that was proposed in Congress in 2011. These specific milestones were chosen because of their impact on gender issues specifically related to sexual assault. Title IX is part of the Education Amendments of 1972 and aims to protect all people from being discriminated against based on sex in federally-funded education programs or activities (Office for Civil Rights 2015). While not initially used in this way, in recent years, Title IX has had a great influence on how on-campus sexual violence incidents are addressed by colleges and universities. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) had a dramatic effect on how the criminal justice system responded to violence against women, especially sexual violence, and the services and supports available to victims of said violence (The White House n.d.). Unlike the other two pieces of legislation, the proposed No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act did not pass in Congress to become law and did not legislate changes related to sexual violence against women. ‘Legitimate rape’ was used by one of the bill’s co-sponsors, Representative Todd Akin of Missouri, when describing how legitimate rape does not lead to pregnancy for biological reasons (Millhiser 2012). ‘Forcible rape’ was used in the bill by Akin and his co-sponsor Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and defined only as rapes involving overt acts of violence (Millhiser 2012). This bill brought the language around sexual violence, the role of the victim, and the role of the perpetrator into the national spotlight in an important way.

Procedure

The focus of the study is on articles published in *The Indianapolis Star* during the years 1970, 1974, 1992, 1996, 2009, and 2013, which includes the two years before and two years after each respective piece of legislation. Reviewing the articles two years prior to the legislation will allow for a more accurate general look at reporting during the time period before the legislation was enacted/proposed while avoiding any potential inciting events that may have led to the legislation that received exceptional news coverage. Similarly, reviewing articles from two years after the legislation will allow time for the initial response and coverage of the issue to settle, so there is again, a more accurate look of how sexual violence was reported following the legislation. The articles were chosen by searching *The Indianapolis Star* archives on Newspapers.com using the keywords ‘sexual assault’, ‘rape’, ‘sexual violence’, ‘assault’, ‘intercourse’, ‘carnal knowledge’, and ‘sex by force’. The articles were reviewed to confirm that they discuss sexual violence, include at least three sentences, reference a specific incident of sexual violence, and refer to both the victim and perpetrator in some capacity. Only articles reporting unique incidents for that year were included in the analysis, using the earliest article published on the incident. In all, 361 distinct articles were included in the analysis, as identified in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of articles analyzed by year

Year	Number of Articles
1970	51
1974	59
1992	59
1996	95
2009	31
2013	39
Total	362

Coding

For each article selected, the following variables were coded for use of soft language, descriptions of who can be assaulted, any mitigating or escalating factors that would lead to sexual violence, use of rape myths, discussion of the alleged perpetrator's guilt or innocence, and the consideration of the incident of sexual violence as related to global social issues of gender inequality. Coding was based on the presence of each theme, not the number of times they appeared in the articles. A codebook was developed based on the literature reviewed and tested by two coders who used it to analyze the same 15, randomly-selected articles. Both coders used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to track which codes were present in each article. Based on the results of the double coding, the codebook was refined. For the final analysis, the articles were coded for 24 variables. Descriptions of the variables are included in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Article code themes and variables

Theme	Variable	Description
Soft Language	Passive Voice	Grammatical construction that places the object of the action as the subject of the clause instead of the actor, which places the focus of the sentence on the object instead of the acting agent. Description of action happening to the victim or perpetrator specifically related to the act of sexual violence.
	Couple as Agent	Instead of describing the victim or the perpetrator as the main actor in the incident, they are presented as a unit, together, as the doers of the actions related to the assault
	De-gendered Descriptors	Use of gender-neutral terms to describe the victim or perpetrator instead of gender-specific pronouns
	Descriptions of Non-Consensual Acts as Romantic	Use of terms that generally describe consensual sexual or romantic acts when describing the activities related to an incident of sexual violence
	Victim as Accuser	Use of the term 'accuser' instead of 'victim' or 'alleged victim'; includes the idea that the perpetrator is in the position only because the victim has filed a complaint or charges
	Perpetrator as Accused	Use of the term 'accused' instead of 'perpetrator', 'alleged perpetrator', 'attacker', or 'alleged attacker'
Who Can Be Assaulted	Victim as Ordinary	Use of terms that paint the victim as unexceptional or one of many of a similar type
	Perpetrator as Ordinary	Use of terms that paint the perpetrator as unexceptional

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		or one of many of a similar type
	Sympathetic Victim	Suggestion that the victim is particularly worthy of compassion and empathy, often considered to be vulnerable members of society
Escalation Factors	Victim as Violent	Accounting any physical or sexual violence or threats of violence on the part of the victim leading up to the incident of sexual violence, whether or not the violence was directed toward the eventual assailant. This includes any references to a history of physically or sexually violent actions. This does not include actions that are specified as self-defense.
	Perpetrator as Violent	Accounting any physical or sexual violence or threats of violence on the part of the perpetrator leading up to the incident of sexual violence, whether or not the violence was directed toward the eventual victim. This includes any references to a history of physically violent actions. This does not include actions that are specified as self-defense.
	Victim's Drug/Alcohol Use	Accounting any consumption of alcohol or drugs on the part of the victim
	Perpetrator's Drug/Alcohol Use	Accounting any consumption of alcohol or drugs on the part of the perpetrator
	Previous Relationship between Victim and Perpetrator	Indication of prior history between the victim and the perpetrator, whether romantic, friendly, co-workers
Rape Myths	Victim Is Lying	Suggestion that the victim is falsely accusing the perpetrator, including motive for lying
	Victim Deserved It	Suggestion that the sexual violence was justified based on the kind of person the victim is
	Victim Asked for It	Suggestion that the sexual violence happened because the victim wanted to be assaulted or put herself in an especially vulnerable situation
	Perpetrator Couldn't Stop	Suggestion that the attacker was overwhelmed by his baser instincts and not responsible for his actions, such as the victim incited the assault
	Perpetrator Too Good	Suggestion that the perpetrator is a decent, caring individual incapable of committing such a crime
	Shock at Perpetrator	Suggested surprise or disbelief that the perpetrator would do such a thing given his social or professional status/standing; not disgust-related shock at the heinousness of a crime
	Rape Is Trivial/Normal	Suggestion that sexual violence is not "violence" but just unwanted sexual contact, so it is not a big deal and just a part of life
Guilt	Alleged Perpetrator Is Guilty	Specific mention of the conviction or sentencing of the perpetrator related to the current sexual assault case; does not include results of civil suits or organizational disciplinary action

Innocence	Alleged Perpetrator is Innocent	Specific mention of the acquittal of the suspect related to or dismissal of the current sexual assault case; does not include results of civil suits or organizational disciplinary action
Connection to Gender Issues	Sexual Violence as Gender Issue	Relating the particular incident back to sexual violence as a broad, social issue related to gender inequality

Results

All of the 362 articles included at least one of the five negative code themes, with more than three-quarters of the articles (76 percent) including at least three themes. While article length was not a variable analyzed for all of the articles, a sample of five articles from each year studied – 30 articles total – suggest that the number of themes found in each article does not correlate to the length of the article. As seen in Figure 1, the most common theme is who can be involved in sexual violence, with more than nine-in-ten articles (91 percent) referring to the victim as ordinary or especially sympathetic or the perpetrator as ordinary. Nearly three-quarters of the articles (74 percent) referenced some escalating factor that led to the sexual assault, and 72 percent used soft language to describe the incident. Almost one-half (49 percent) use at least one of seven rape myths. One-in-five articles specifically note that the perpetrator was convicted of the sexual assault, while only one-in-twenty document that the alleged perpetrator was acquitted or the case was dismissed. Only 13 percent of the articles connect the incident of sexual violence to global gender issues.

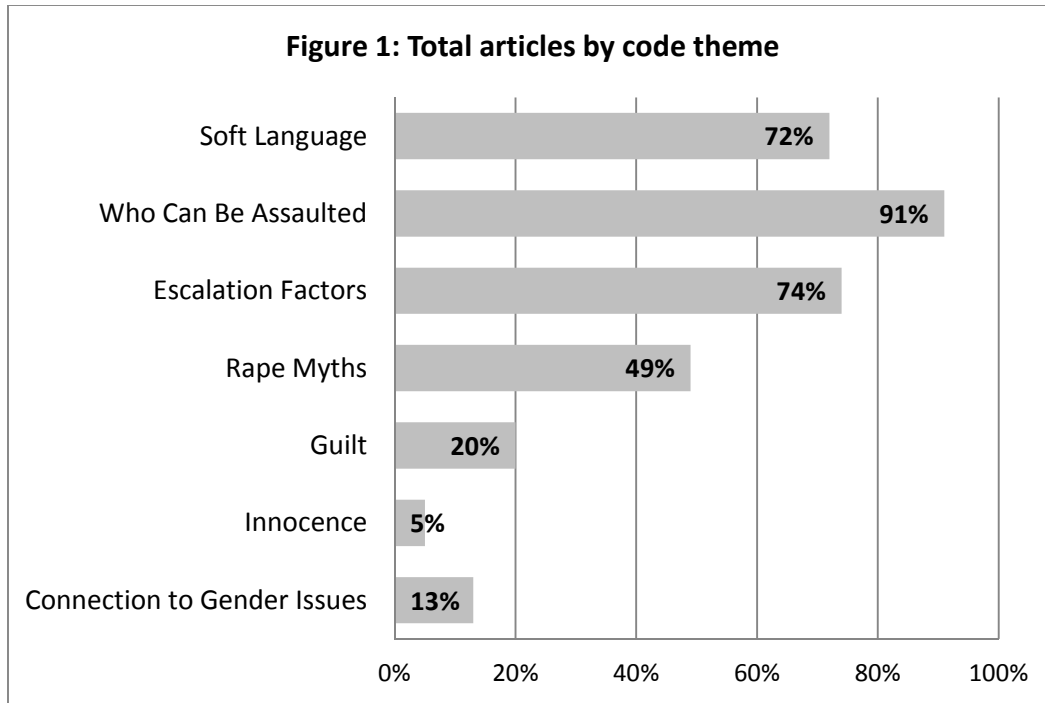


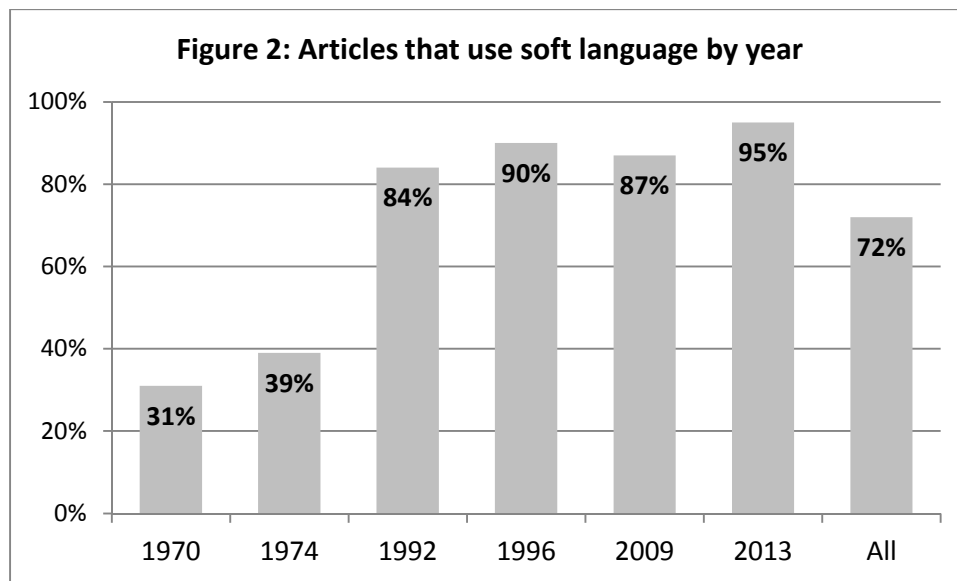
Table 3: Articles by code theme by year

	Soft Language	Could Be Anyone	Escalation Factors	Rape Myths	Guilt	Innocence	Connection to Gender Issues
1970	31%	86%	71%	29%	24%	2%	10%
1974	39%	90%	75%	29%	14%	3%	14%
1992	84%	89%	76%	55%	28%	9%	17%
1996	90%	92%	74%	54%	9%	5%	9%
2009	87%	94%	74%	55%	23%	6%	0%
2013	95%	95%	72%	62%	23%	0%	26%

Soft Language

Soft language in descriptions of sexual violence includes the use of passive voice, referring to the couple as the agent of the incident, using de-gendered language, describing non-consensual acts in a romantic or consensual way, and referring to the victim as the ‘accuser’ or perpetrator as the ‘accused’. Figure 2 shows the share of articles in each year that use at least one form of soft language. In the 1970s, the use of soft language was much less frequent than in later years. While fewer than two-in-five articles in 1970 and 1974 (31 percent and 39 percent,

respectively), the number jumped to more than four-in-five by 1992, with 95 percent of the articles in 2013 using at least one type of soft language.



The most common form of soft language used in the articles is gender-neutral descriptors of the victim and perpetrator, as two-in-five articles reflect this. For example, a 2009 article stated, “The assailants reportedly beat the victim,” (Star Staff 2009). Almost the same share of articles (38 percent) used passive voice in describing the sexual assault incident, such as, “She was taken from the home and driven to a vacant lot...where she was raped,” (Staff and Wire Reports 1992).

Around the same percentage of articles used romantic or consensual language to describe sexual violence (15 percent), referred to the perpetrator as ‘accused’ (13 percent), and referred to the victim as the ‘accuser’ (10 percent). Examples of consensual language include the description of a rape as, “In the moments that followed, the then 23-year-old woman lost her virginity,” (Evans 2013) or a 1992 article that read, “A 17-year-old female student said he [assailant] kissed, fondled and propositioned her,” (Staff and Wire Reports 1992). Only two percent of the articles

made the couple as the agent of the action, as a 2009 article did with “After she [the victim] accompanied Smith [assailant] on [police] runs, she and Smith engaged in sex,” (Murray 2009).

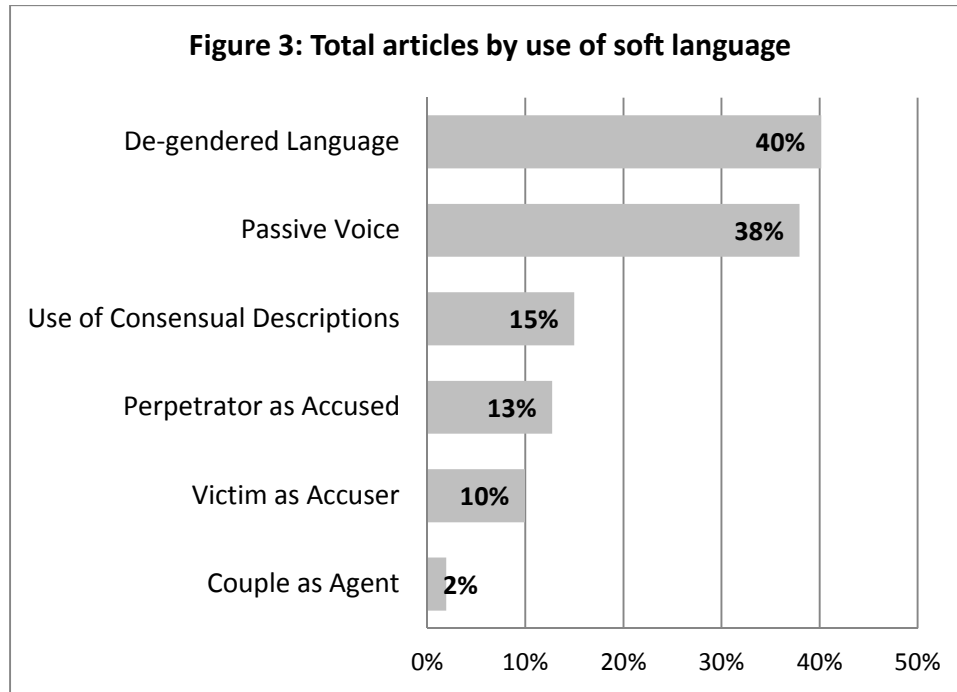


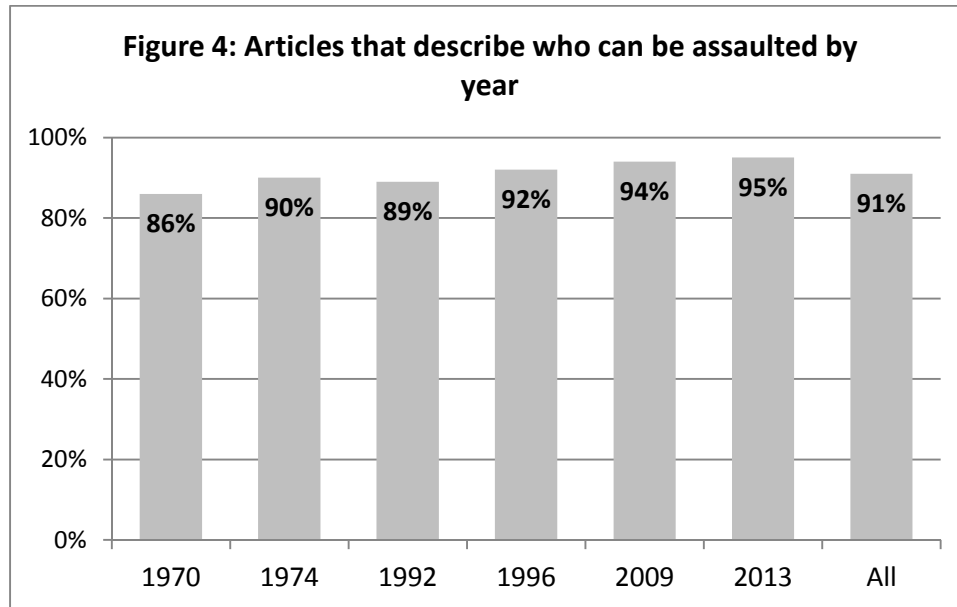
Table 4: Articles by strong language variable by year

	De-gendered Language	Passive Voice	Consensual Descriptors	Perp as Accused	Victim as Accuser	Couple as Agent
1970	8%	14%	6%	4%	2%	0%
1974	8%	34%	2%	0%	3%	0%
1992	41%	40%	18%	9%	15%	1%
1996	61%	46%	22%	14%	11%	1%
2009	45%	52%	29%	32%	12%	3%
2013	30%	41%	18%	33%	13%	10%

Who Can Be Assaulted

Descriptions of victims as one of a large group or especially sympathetic relate to readers’ understanding of who can be assaulted, and descriptions of perpetrators as one of a group relate to readers’ understanding of who commits sexual assault. In each year for which articles were analyzed, about nine-in-ten articles used at least one of these descriptions, as seen

in Figure 4. While 1970 has the smallest share of articles using these variables, that share is still 86 percent. In 2013, 95 percent of the articles described victims or perpetrators in this way, which was the largest percentage.



In the articles, when the authors suggest the victim is ordinary, the victim is extraordinarily sympathetic, or the perpetrator is ordinary, this leads to the understanding of whom common victims and perpetrators are. Examples of describing either the victim or perpetrator as ordinary include referring to the victim as “a Northside housewife” (Anderson 1970) and referring to the perpetrator as “a former Las Vegas (Nev.) waiter,” (*Indianapolis Star* 1974b), while a sympathetic victim includes “a 25-year-old mother,” (Niederpruem 1992). Describing the victim as ordinary was the most common variable, used in more than three-in-four articles (77 percent). Almost one-half of the articles (49 percent) described the victim as especially sympathetic, and 44 percent described the perpetrator as ordinary.

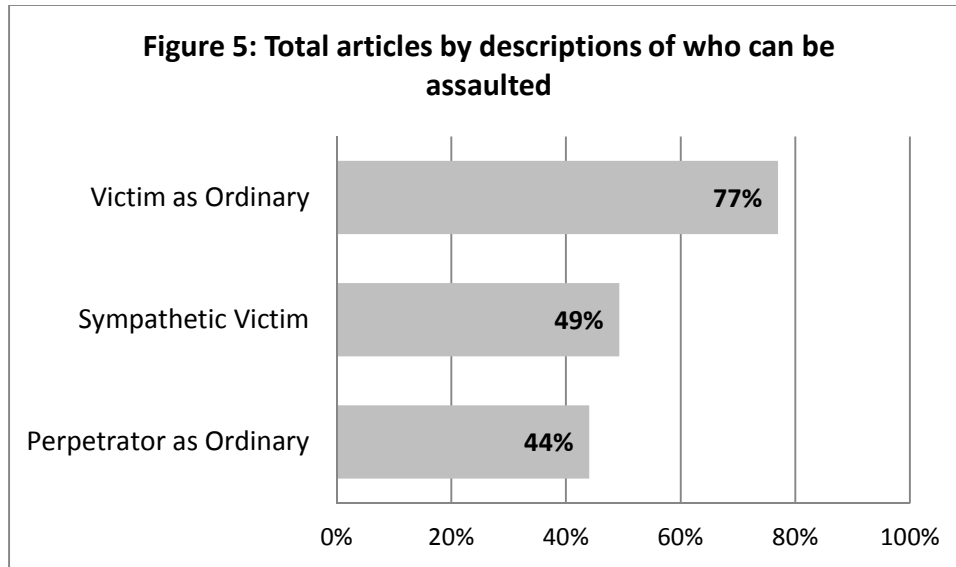
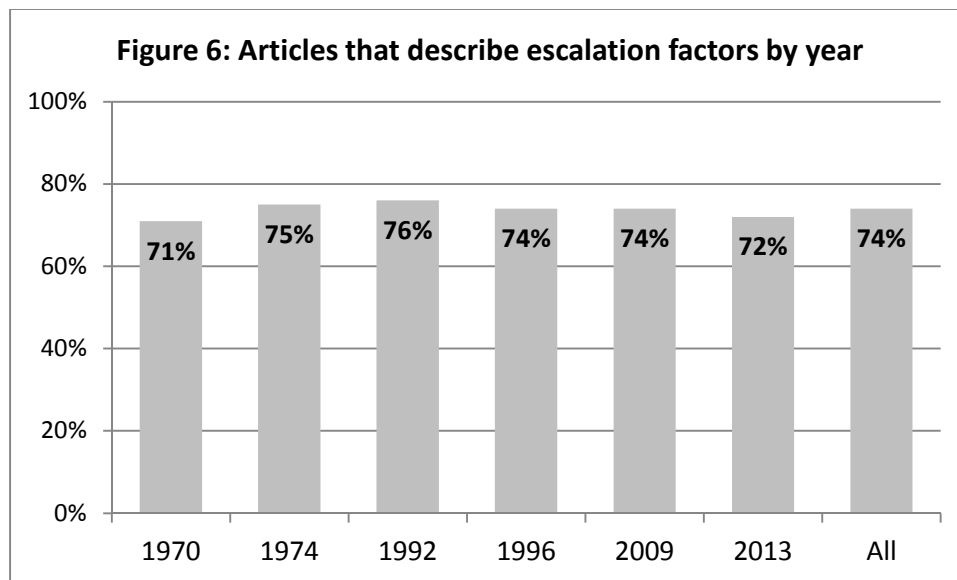


Table 5: Articles by strong language variable by year			
	Victim as Ordinary	Sympathetic Victim	Perpetrator as Ordinary
1970	57%	49%	29%
1974	80%	41%	20%
1992	81%	58%	45%
1996	78%	43%	55%
2009	71%	58%	65%
2013	90%	49%	54%

Escalation Factors

Many articles that report on incidents of sexual violence include descriptions of escalating or mitigating factors. These factors include acts of violence by the victim or the perpetrator – whether leading up to the sexual assault or at some previous time, use of drugs or alcohol by the victim or the perpetrator, and the existence of a prior relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Over the six years analyzed, there was the least difference in the shares of articles that included escalation factors – only five percentage points separate the year with the smallest share of articles that include at least one escalating factor, 1970, and the year with the greatest share, 1992 (71 percent and 76 percent, respectively).



By far, the most commonly included escalating factor was the perpetrator as violent, as more than one-half of articles (52 percent) described violent acts committed by the perpetrator, aside from the incident of sexual assault itself. An example includes the following description of an assailant, “He was shot after pointing a .38-caliber pistol at a detective’s face,” (Associated Press 1974). Three-in-ten articles describe some prior relationship between the sexual assault victim and perpetrator, including “Police went to his mother’s apartment and arrested her former boyfriend after she identified him as the attacker,” (Gelarden 1996). Seven percent of the articles describe the victim using alcohol or drugs, and the same share describe the perpetrator using alcohol or drugs. A 1996 article references the victim’s alcohol use, “The woman, also a student, had passed out after drinking at the party ,” (Associated Press 1996), while a 2013 article refers to the assailant’s alcohol use, “Mr. Hilbert [victim’s husband] believed that Mr. Menard’s [assailant] judgment was impaired because of alcohol,” (Swiatek 2013). Only two percent of the articles analyzed describe violence committed by the victim that was not in self-defense, such as “Fisher [victim], 21, is serving 15 years at Albion Correctional Facility for shooting the wife of her former lover,” (Wire Service Reports 1996).

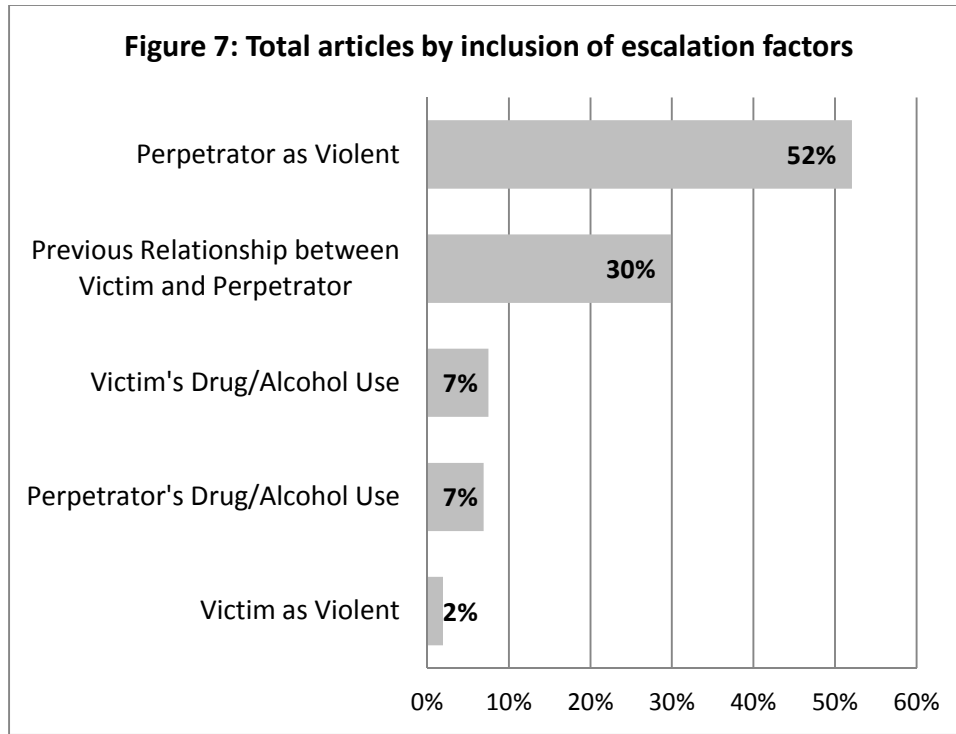


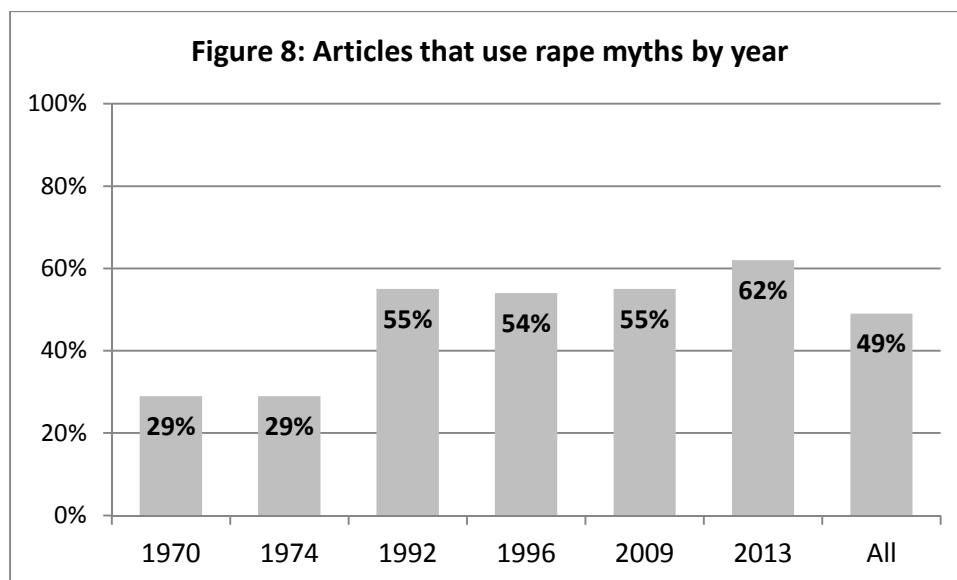
Table 6: Articles by escalation factor variable by year

	Perpetrator as Violent	Previous Relationship between Victim and Perpetrator	Victim's Drug/Alcohol Use	Perpetrator's Drug/Alcohol Use	Victim as Violent
1970	59%	16%	2%	6%	0%
1974	75%	5%	0%	3%	2%
1992	45%	46%	12%	8%	1%
1996	52%	30%	9%	9%	5%
2009	32%	45%	6%	3%	3%
2013	41%	33%	13%	8%	0%

Rape Myths

The rape myths often woven into descriptions of sexual violence include the idea that the victim is lying, that the victim deserved to be assaulted, that the victim asked to be assaulted, that the perpetrator should not be held responsible for his/her actions because s/he could not help him/herself, that the perpetrator is a good person who would never commit assault, shock that the

perpetrator would commit an assault based on his/her position in society, and that rape is normal or trivial. Figure 8 shows the share of articles in each year that use at least one of these rape myths. In the 1970s, rape myths were used much less frequently than in later years. Fewer than one-third of articles in 1970 and 1974 (29 percent in both years) included rape myths, while around 55 percent of articles in 1992, 1996, and 2009 included these myths. The share of articles that included rape myths in 2013 was more than twice those of the 1970s, as 62 percent of articles in 2013 used rape myths when discussing sexual assault cases.



The common rape myths are generally either about the perpetrator or the victim. More than one-in-four articles (28 percent) described shock that the perpetrator could commit sexual violence, the most commonly used rape myth, while five percent of the articles suggested the perpetrator was a good person who could not have committed sexual assault, and only two percent of the articles described the perpetrator being overcome to the point that he could not stop himself from committing the assault. Examples of shock at the perpetrator include “a former South Bend high school basketball star accused of committing four rapes,” (Star State Report 1970) and “Hartman [assailant] has been dismissed as a volunteer youth pastor at the Salvation

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Army-Johnson County Corps Center of Hope,” (Thomas 2009). A 1974 article referred to the perpetrator being too good to commit such a crime, “‘Earnest [the assailant] was a very good child and now he’s a fine person. He could do no wrong.’” (Pickering 1974). An example of the rape myth that the perpetrator could not stop himself includes, “A convicted sex offender accused of sexually assaulting and killing a 17-year-old Southern Indiana girl says he didn’t plan the crime but ‘lost control’ after the girl resisted his advances,” (Star News Services 2013).

Regarding the victim, 15 percent of the articles suggested the victim asked to be assaulted, ten percent suggested that the victim lied about being assaulted, and three percent suggested the victim deserved to be assaulted. An example of the myth that the victim asked to be assaulted includes,

The rape of another young woman on the Westside early yesterday brought renewed pleas from investigators that women living in apartments employ reasonable protections to protect themselves from intruders. Yesterday’s victim...opened the back door to her assailant at 4:20 a.m. (*Indianapolis Star* 1970).

This compares with the myth that the victim deserved to be assaulted, such as the following description of an inmate who was raped in jail, “The woman was charged with five counts of prostitution and one count of public indecency,” (Tuohy 2013). A 2009 article suggests the victim is lying, “Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger said allegations by a Nevada casino hostess that he raped her a year ago are ‘false and vicious.’ A 31-year-old Nevada woman has filed a civil lawsuit against the Super Bowl-winning quarterback,” (Star News Services 2009). One-in-ten articles described sexual assault as being a normal or uneventful occurrence. An example of this include the following description of a rape on a college campus from an administrator, “‘It’s a great disappointment, one of those things that happen, and we’ll just have to set it behind us,’” (Associated Press 1974).

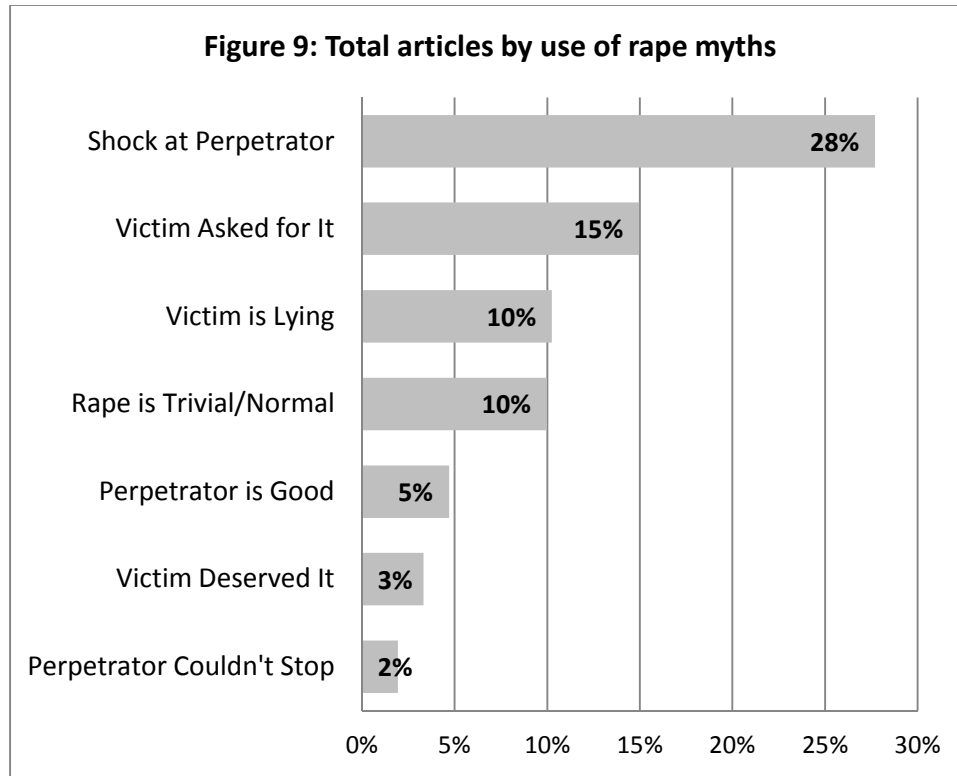


Table 7: Articles by rape myth variable by year

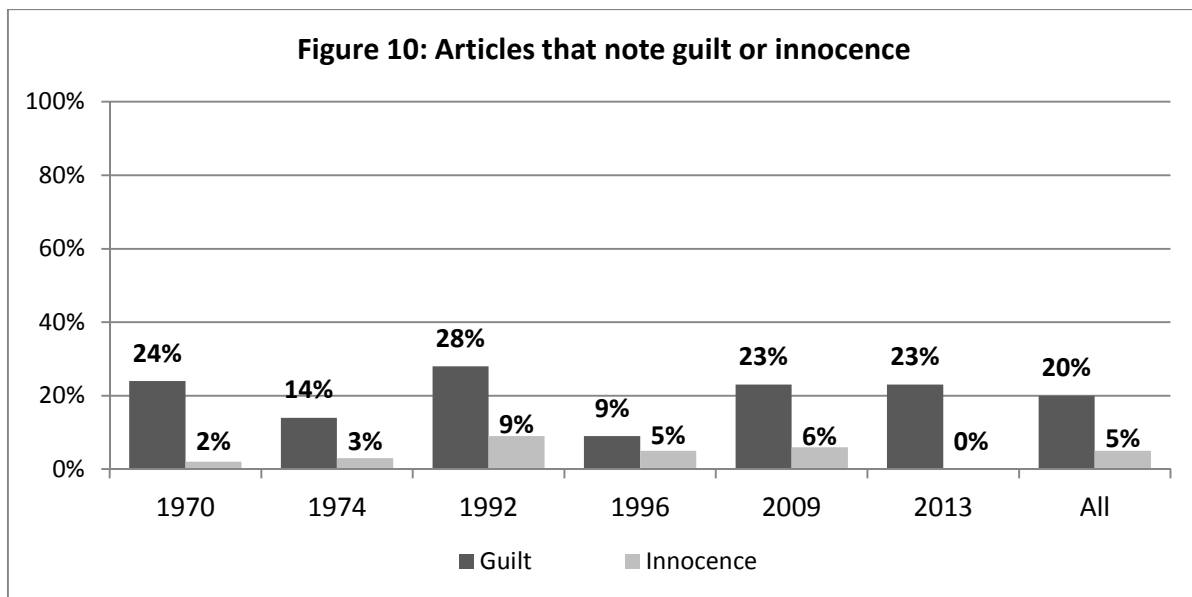
	Shock at Perpetrator	Victim Asked for It	Victim is Lying	Rape is Trivial/Normal	Perpetrator is Good	Victim Deserved It	Perpetrator Couldn't Stop
1970	12%	10%	6%	10%	2%	4%	4%
1974	8%	10%	7%	8%	3%	0%	2%
1992	36%	17%	14%	7%	6%	1%	0%
1996	32%	16%	11%	15%	3%	8%	3%
2009	45%	16%	10%	10%	10%	0%	0%
2013	33%	21%	10%	8%	5%	5%	3%

Guilt/Innocence

One-in-four of the articles analyzed discuss whether or not the alleged perpetrator was convicted of the incident of sexual violence or whether the alleged perpetrator was acquitted or charges were dismissed. 1992 had the greatest share of articles that referenced the alleged perpetrator's guilt and the greatest share of articles that referenced the alleged perpetrator's innocence (28 percent and 9 percent, respectively). In 1970, there was the smallest share of

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articles referring to the alleged perpetrator's guilt (2 percent), and 2013 had the smallest share of articles referring to the alleged perpetrator's innocence (zero). References to the perpetrator's guilt include, "A jury found former world heavyweight boxing champion Trevor Berbick guilty Friday of raping a woman who worked as a baby-sitter for his family," (Schneider 1992). On the other hand, references to the alleged perpetrator's innocence include, "David Hampton...was acquitted of burglary, rape and armed rape charges by a Criminal Court jury last night," (*Indianapolis Star* 1974a).



Connections to Global Societal Issues

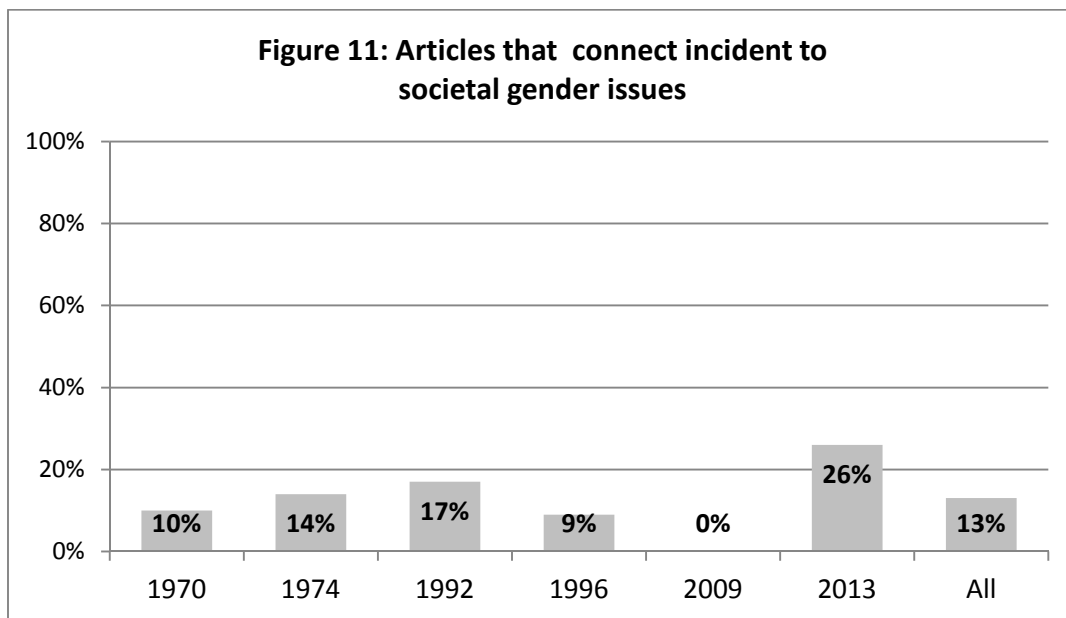
There were no trends to the shares of articles in each year that connected the incident of sexual violence to greater, global issues of gender equality. Examples of this global connection include the following description of a civil case related to a rape on a college campus, "It is the first civil case brought under the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, which recognized crimes against women as deprivation of civil rights and gave individuals a right to sue for damages in federal court," (Berstein 1996). Another example is,

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Indiana ranked second in the rate of high school females reporting they have been victims of sexual assault, according to a 2010 study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Statistics reveal 1 in 6 girls will become the victim of sexual assault during their lifetime...and the risk is highest for teen girls. (Evans 2013)

None of the articles in 2009 made this connection, while more than one-quarter of the articles in 2013 did (26 percent). One-in-ten articles in 1970 referred to global gender issues, and the share increased in 1974 to 14 percent. In 1992, 17 percent of articles made connections to societal issues, but that share dropped in 1996 to only 9 percent. Overall, 13 percent of articles that discussed specific incidents of sexual violence connected those incidents to global gender inequality.



Conclusions

The *Indianapolis Star* reported on more than 360 individual incidents of sexual violence across 1970, 1974, 1992, 1996, 2009, and 2013, and the levels to which the newspaper demonstrated bias against the victim or recognized sexual violence as an issue of global gender inequality varied from year to year. Looking at the seven themes under which variables were

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coded, there were two in which the frequency of articles including variables within that category remained fairly stable – Who Can Be Assaulted and Escalation Factors. Neither changes in knowledge about sexual violence over the past 45 years nor the women’s rights legislation of 1972, 1994, or 2011 seemed to influence how the *Indianapolis Star* used these descriptors when reporting on sexual assault incidents.

While there were variances over time in whether the newspaper specifically noted the alleged perpetrator’s guilt or innocence, there were no real trends in how or why those variances arose. The same can be said for the connection to issues of gender inequality in society. However, it should be celebrated that more than one-in-four of the articles in 2013 made this connection.

This leaves two themes that have showed some significant change over time. Soft language was least prevalent in articles about sexual violence in the 1970s. Between 1970 and 2013, the share of articles jumped from 31 percent to 95 percent. One element of soft language, the use of passive voice, followed the same trend, which is counter to expectations based on the literature available. While few scholars have written about shifts in the use of passive voice compared with active voice over time, the literature that does exist suggests that use of active voice has been encouraged since decades prior to 1970 (Perlman 2013), and that active voice surpassed passive voice in common usage, at least in scientific writing, active voice is now used more commonly than passive in scientific articles (Alvin 2013).

In addition to the more frequent use of soft language over time, soft language was also used more often two years after each legislative event than the two years before it – the share increasing by 6-8% in each set of years. This suggests that time has moderated the *Indianapolis Star*’s language when discussing sexual violence to separate the reader from the victims and the acts,

and perhaps dialogues about Title IX, the VAWA, and the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act have also led to the use of more temperate language.

The *Indianapolis Star* has also used rape myths more frequently in recent years than in the 1970s. In both 1970 and 1974, only 29 percent of articles included at least one rape myth. This percentage jumped to around 55 percent in 1992, 1996, and 2009. However, in the most recent year, 2013, 62 percent of articles used at least one rape myth. This suggests that rape myths may have become more widely used or engrained in the culture since the 1970s. The 2011 legislation, the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, is in fact based on a rape myth, so it is not unsurprising that rape myths are more commonly used after discussions about this legislation, with the myths possibly legitimized by the legislative action.

Overall, despite an increased awareness of sexual violence against women since 1970, the *Indianapolis Star* has either continued to report on sexual assault incidents in about the same way or in ways that are less sensitive to victims over time. While making some connections to the gender inequality of sexual violence, reports on incidents of sexual violence continue to reinforce this inequality with bias against the victim.

Discussion

Of the seven themes for which articles in the study were analyzed, the prevalence of Who Can Be Assaulted and Escalation Factors remained fairly stable, while the frequency of references to alleged perpetrators' guilt or innocence and connections to gender inequality in society demonstrated no real trends. The two themes for which there were noteworthy trends are the use of Soft Language and Rape Myths. In both cases, the prevalence increased dramatically from 1970 to 2013. Instead of the noted issues related to reporting about sexual violence

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improving over time, with increased awareness and understanding of sexual assault, these findings suggest the opposite.

Looking at the two years surrounding the three legislative milestones related to sexual violence, in 1972, 1994, and 2011, the use of Soft Language and the references included in Could Be Anyone are the only two themes areas in which there were consistent differences before and after the legislative event. In both cases, the prevalence of the problematic language was greater after each milestone. While these legislative activities may have contributed to the conversation and cultural understanding of sexual violence, the findings suggest they did not affect how individual incidents of sexual violence are reported.

For the use of both Soft Language and Rape Myths, the greatest increases in frequency occurred from the 1970s to the 1990s. The differences between the 1990s frequencies and the 2000s frequencies are much smaller. Perhaps this is due to the social climate of the 1970s. In the midst of the second-wave feminist movement, the 1970s saw widespread awareness efforts related to the scope and impact of rape, the establishment of the first rape crisis centers, efforts to improve how victims were treated in the criminal justice system, including hundreds of new laws to protect victims, and better medical and mental health services for victims (Kilpatrick 2000). The 1970s saw the birth of the anti-rape movement, a product of the civil rights and feminist movements (Kilpatrick 2000; McMahon and Baker 2011), so it makes sense that newspaper journalists during the 1970s would have ready access to topical, cutting-edge information about rape and sexual assault, making them especially sensitive to how they report on incidents of sexual violence. On the other hand, the influx of pornography and the accompanying degrading language of the 1990s and 2000s may have worked to counter the information and anti-rape efforts of the 1970s (McMahon and Baker 2011).

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Among the results of the anti-rape movement started in the 1970s is the expansion of the acts and behaviors that are considered sexual violence (Kilpatrick 2000; McMahon and Baker 2011). Legally and socially, sexual violence has been come to be understood as more of a continuum, as compared with the 1962 definition of rape which could only be committed by a man who has intercourse with a woman other than his wife by force or threat of force, injury, kidnapping, or death (Kilpatrick 2000; McMahon and Baker 2011). Since the 1970s, the definition of sexual violence expanded from a woman being forced to have sexual intercourse by violence from a man other than her husband to include acts against women, against wives by their husbands, acts beyond vaginal penetration, acts that result from coercion or incapacitation, and more (Kilpatrick 2000; McMahon and Baker 2011). While most people understand that the act of rape is wrong, the public's understanding of sexual violence has changed over the years, and as a result, their attitudes about what acts are wrong become less straightforward – they think that yes, sex by force is wrong, but what if the woman was just a little too drunk or the assailant only groped but not penetrated (McMahon and Baker 2011). As a result, subtle forms of victim blaming creep into the public consciousness (McMahon and Baker 2011). This may account for the increases in the prevalence of Soft Language, and especially Rape Myths, in the later years of the articles.

Despite the positive steps that have been made regarding sexual violence, there is still a great deal of work to do, as evidenced by the millions of individuals – all ages and genders – who are sexually assaulted every year in the United States and persistent victim blaming (Kilpatrick 2000; McMahon and Baker 2011). McMahon and Baker (2011) note that there is a significant gap in attitudes toward sexual violence, especially toward supporting victims and perpetrator accountability, between individuals who work in the field, e.g., advocates, health

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practitioners, and researchers, and the public at large. This suggests that while there is increased understanding and awareness of sexual violence in the 1990s and, especially, the 2000s as compared with the 1970s, that understanding may be limited to a small group of people who are already interested in the issue sexual violence, but it has not trickled down to the general public, including newspaper reporters.

The findings of the study reflect the literature reviewed. The ways in which the newspaper articles discuss gender most notably aligns with the gender theory found in Risman (2004). The articles mirror the embodied expectations and gender norms of a society in which more than two-in-five women experience sexual violence at some point in their lives (Basile et al. 2014; Risman 2004). The articles analyzed demonstrate how gender inequalities are created and reinforced at and across three levels – at the individual level, the interactional level, and the institutional level. – and how status expectations, cognitive bias, othering, and alter casting can be found in the reports of sexual assault (Risman 2004).

The articles, in their descriptions of the dynamics of males and females, perpetuate sex roles and gender norms, the individual level (Risman 2004). For example, a 1974 article “warned women hitchhikers of the risks involved” after the rapes of two female hitchhikers within a week, but there was no warning on the dangers to men who might choose to hitchhike (*Indianapolis Star* 1974c). The weaker, less capable women have to be warned against an activity that braver, stronger, smarter men can handle without issue. Several articles also described the interactions between husbands and wives, depicting gender stratification at the interactional level (Risman 2004). A 1992 article reports on a jury’s acquittal of a man who raped his wife after watching the videotape of the assault – the man videotaped himself “having sex with his wife, who was tied up with her mouth and eyes taped shut,” and this male behavior

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was deemed acceptable by a jury of eight women and four men (Star Wire Reports 1992).

Finally, the fact that these ideas of gender are perpetuated through the media via these articles demonstrates the institutional level (Risman 2004).

While aligning with Risman's gender theory, the findings also reflect Hollander and Rodgers' (2014) theories about journalism. The types of sexual violence cases reported in the articles suggest that sensationalized "newsworthy" items are generally prioritized over other stories, with 70 percent of the articles reporting on stranger attacks of sexual violence. As Risman (2004) noted the interconnected relationship between the individual, interactions with others, and social institutions related to gender, Hollander and Rodgers (2014) highlighted a similar concept with journalism. They noted the fact that reporters are members of the public and draw on the social norms and values that are shared through social interactions and institutions, and those biases can inform their reporting, and those reports can, in turn, shape public opinion (Hollander and Rodgers 2014). The findings also demonstrate the elements of language discussed in the literature related to sexual violence, including passive voice, the couple as agent, obfuscation of gender, consensual descriptions of non-consensual acts, framing of the assault, details of the assault, and rape myths.

While the findings align with the literature, there were limitations to this study. The first limitation is related to the fact that only one coder was used for the content analysis. Given the nature of the subject matter and the study approach, there is some subjectivity and the chance for personal biases to influence the analysis. In order to mitigate this issue, two coders were used to test and refine the codebook to develop clear definitions and examples in order to make the analysis process as objective as possible. Given that the analysis was done on articles from only six years in only one newspaper, the applicability of the results is another limitation. Additional

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years would need to be included in the study to get a more complete picture of how reporting has changed over time, and additional newspapers would need to be included in the study to get a better picture of how the legislative events affected reporting on sexual violence. Also, including additional cities' newspapers in a study would provide insight on if any changes could be seen nationally or if they were only reflective of the norms and culture of central Indiana. There are many opportunities to expand on the research started with this study.

With incidents of sexual assault grossly underreported in the United States (Basile et al. 2014; Hollander and Rodgers 2014; Riski and Grusin 2003), how the media represents known cases of sexual violence is important in the public's understanding of sexual violence and how the public relates to victims of sexual violence (Black 1995; Hollander and Rodgers 2014; Lamb and Keon 1995). The media has a responsibility to victims of sexual violence, women, and the public as a whole to report on incidents of sexual assault in a way that does not re-victimize those involved and does not perpetuate gender norms that contribute to gender inequality. But beyond doing no harm, the media has an opportunity to challenge the status quo of gender in society and educate the public about sexual violence. With responsible, comprehensive reporting on sexual assault, perhaps the media can help reduce the stigma and fear surrounding reporting sexual assault and greater public awareness of sexual violence as a social issue, ultimately, leading to a reduction in sexual violence incidents.

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