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"Boys will be boys and she was asking for it" How the Media Perpetuates Victim Blaming and the Rape Myth in Rape Cases

Arianny Cabrera
acabrer6@binghamton.edu

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The media portrayal of rape influences how the public views, not only that specific case, but rape in general. Many newspapers publish articles describe a case in favor of either the victim or the attacker. Many victims are described as promiscuous or naive women/girls who were asking for the attack and brought it on themselves. Language that victim blames and perpetuates the rape myth is subtly, at times blatantly, used in order to discredit the person who should be protected. Instead, the crime itself is justified in a way that lets the public think that either the woman caused her own attack, thereby relieving the rapist of responsibility. Alternatively, media portrays rape as a women's morning after regret, rather than an attack, again alleviating rapist responsibility. Most of this research focuses on how the media characterizes one or more factors of the case, such as race or the victim's relationship status. Instead, I use a 21-point system of analysis to examine three different newspaper articles of 4 national rape cases. Media perpetuates a general justification of rape, victim blaming, and rape myths in the United States.

Rape Myth

Rape myths are widely held but false beliefs about rape and rape cases that are often used to justify male sexual aggression against women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald,1994). Rape myths stem from the notion that individuals who come forward with rape allegations are lying about the rape. Further, that she actually enjoyed it or caused it. Statements such as "she was asking for it," "all women want to be raped," "well, she was physically aroused, so she obviously enjoyed it" are just a few examples of rape myths. Studies have been conducted to determine the impact of

rape myths on college campuses as well as in the minds of police officers. Lisa Romano's study discovered that men were more likely than women to believe rape myths when the victim was in a relationship with the attacker and when the attacker's motivation was due to rejection. R.M. Venema also conducted a study which evaluated the perceptions and belief of the rape myth among police officers that handle rape cases. The officers were given a case in which a victim was at a party the night before and went to the attacker's apartment for coffee when the assault occurred. The cases vary from not drinking to drinking and the assailant being an ex-boyfriend or guy she just met. Officers were then asked to rate whether this was a strong case, credible victim, and and whether this was considered a legitimate sexual assault. The results found that officers determine if a case is "good" or not does depend on case/victim profile and does influence how quickly suspects are arrested (Venema 2016). The widespread belief in rape myths in our society influences how our society views rape.

Historical Reference

The Central Park Five case in 1989 is a landmark case that has shows rape myth acceptance. The anonymous woman known as the central park jogger was raped, beaten, and left unconscious while on a jog in 1989. She woke up from a coma twelve days later without memory of the attack. Six African American men were questioned and confessed to this crime and five were convicted for it (the sixth pled down to lesser charges). This case dominated the media with very little victim blaming and heavy emphasis on the alleged assailants. Nine years after the conviction, a serial rapist admitted to the attack and this was confirmed with a DNA test from evidence found at the crime scene. Greg Stratton states, "This indicated a shift away from the institutional tunnel vision that shaped the original public narrative, instead allowing for the narrative of wrongful conviction to emerge as the hegemonic view of the attack the media were

now compelled to present." This rape myth was shattered with the central park five case and was instead replaced with one that women lie about rape. News media focus shifted from solely on the attack of the victim to a focus on the possibility of wrongful convictions and the innocence of alleged attackers. The way that rape cases are portrayed in the news media is constantly changing with the view of rape, the rape myth, and what constitutes a victim. According to Fields, the roles of nature and society were given to women and men. Women were given the role of nature, meaning nurturing/motherly and weak/inferior, while men claimed the role of society, meaning intelligent and civilized. These definitions of the stereotypical or expected roles of men and women are redefined as needed in order to keep women in a position of suppression (Fields, 1990). This includes rape.

Framing

Framing is a tactic used by news media outlets and writers in which a part of reality or an actual event is taken and made more prominent than other events or even other parts of that same event (Entman, 1993). Through this, newspaper articles are able to convey the message they want to reach the audience as well as make sense of the event itself. Through very subtle language, a certain portrayal of an event is written and sent to the public through framing. Gitlin argues that frames are, "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual." Every word or phrase in these articles are specifically tailored to depict rape in way that is preferred by the news media outlet, even if it is not the entire reality of the case. The framing of both the survivors and the attackers in rape cases is very influential on how the public interprets the case. In Stratton's analysis of the central park five case, he stated:

Reporting on high-profile crimes can often create an 'echo-chamber' that justifies:

media attention based on high-level public interest (Peelo, 2006). These narratives can be

developed in contestation between the reality of a crime and public perceptions of crime

that are framed by a combination of reporter selectivity, the facts, and the public's moral

grounding. In wrongful convictions, the shifting nature of the facts is important in

understanding how events and personalities are framed. As a consequence, the news

media shape the public consciousness when the full version of events is yet to be decided.

By reporting rape cases in a certain light, even through subtle language, popular news media

sources that are widely read on a daily basis influence the way that our society views these cases.

If a article uses language that suggests that the victim had a role in his/her own attack, as seen in

the Steubenville case, and that the attacker deserves sympathy, the mass public will be persuaded

to view the case in that way.

Media Perception of Rape Cases

The way that each case is portrayed depends on the news media outlet's perception of the

rape case itself, especially the role of the victim. Benedict examined four cases in the 1970s and

80s and how the media portrayed the case depending on the victim. She analyzed that the media

will depict the victim as either a virgin, meaning that she is innocent and pure, or as a vamp,

meaning the victim caused her attack due to her sexuality or another factor (Benedict 1992).

Whether the victim is viewed as a virgin or vamp by the media, is how she will be described in

news media articles and how the mass public (including potential jury members for that case)

will view the victim (Benedict 1992). Benedict describes eight factors that determine whether a

victim will be looked at as a virgin or vamp as, "If she knows her assailant; if no weapon is used;

if she is of the same race, class or ethnic group as the assailant; if she is young; if she is

considered pretty; and if she in any way deviates from the traditional housewife/mother role"

(Benedict 1992). This argument summarizes the different elements that cause a news media outlet to portray a case in a certain way. Larcombe emphasizes that victims who went against the traditional housewife/good girl stereotype in their personal lives or even on the night of their attack, were not seen or depicted as real victims in the media (Larcombe 2002). Both Benedict and Larcombe focus their arguments on media portrayal of a rape case as either the victim's fault or the attacker's fault depending on who the victim is perceived to be.

Method

My research analyzes language and vocabulary in newspaper articles on rape cases in the last decade. The language and vocabulary that very influential news media outlets have used in rape cases from the last decade, has greatly influenced how our society views rape culture and the rape myth. I look at two local news media articles and two national articles for each case. I use two different coding systems; one for positive language and one for negative. Positive language includes using violent and non-consensual words to describe the attack. However, negative language includes the complete opposite and also involves language that could put the victim in danger (publishing her address, work location, so forth). My hypothesis is that certain newspaper articles use victim blaming language and subtly suggest the rape didn't occur in many rape cases, especially ones where the victim did not follow the stereotypical norms of society (not drinking, not going out alone at night, not dressing provocatively) and where the attacker had a higher class standing than the victim.

Coding Systems

Positive Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Described the victim as innocent			
Rapist is described as guilty			

Language does not put the victim in danger (Giving full name, school, work location, etc.)			
Shameful language of attacker ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")			
Not sexualizing victim			
Non-Consensual Language ("forced," "grabbed," "incapacitated")			
Suggestions that the attacker scouted for his victim or planned attack			
Attacker's previous violent encounters			
Language that points to the attacker knowing what he was doing (ignored protests, threatened victim, etc.)			
Extraneous information that benefits survivor			

I add a point every time this specific language is used by focusing on specific words or phrases that blame the attacker and protect the identity and privacy of the victim (protecting her privacy in her sexuality, relationship history, etc.).

Negative Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Leading language			
Statistics used to either victim blame or cover up rape (number			

of false reports, number of cases of women who are attacked when walking alone at night, etc.)			
Victim described as guilty			
Rapist described as innocent			
Sexualized Survivor			
Shameful language from victim ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")			
Number of times the word "victim" is used			
Consensual Language ("engaged in," "fondle," "oral sex")			
Suggestions that the victim could have prevented the attack			
Extraneous information that benefits Attacker			
Victim's sexuality or sexual history included			

Here again, I add a point when certain language is shown. The phrases and words I look for in this coding system blame the victim and describe the attacker as innocent (focusing on how the attacker's future is destroyed, and his achievements unrelated to the attack).

White athlete assailant vs Black athlete

I first analyzed race through how a white athletic assailant was portrayed relative to a black athletic assailant. Both cases that I used are recent, occurred in 2016, and have made national headlines. Both victims in these two cases are white. In the first case, Brock Turner is white. In the second case, Cory Batey, is african american. For each case, articles one and two

are newspaper publications that are in the top ten most viewed in the United States. The third article used for both cases is a local paper.

Case 1: Brock Turner aka Stanford Swimmer Rapist

In this case, Brock Turner was the sole attacker in the sexual assault of an unconscious woman next to a dumpster on Stanford University. The victim and assailant met at a party where both were drinking, the victim was 22 and Turner was 19 at the time. Brock Turner was prevented from penetrating the victim when two foreign exchange students saw him on top of the unconscious woman and told Turner to stop. Turner then began to run away from the two students before he was apprehended, and the police were called leading to his arrest. Brock Turner was convicted and sentenced to six months in jail and was released within three months.

Article 1: Washington Post article titled, "All-American swimmer found guilty of sexually assaulting unconscious woman on Stanford campus"

Article 2: New York Times article, "Light Sentence for Brock Turner in Stanford Rape Case Draws Outrage"

Article 3: Stanford Daily article titled, "Police report: Brock Turner admits sexual contact, denies alleged rape"

Positive Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Described the victim as innocent	2	6	2
Rapist is described as guilty	2	24	4
Language does not put the victim in danger (Giving full name, school, work location, etc.)	0	0	0
Shameful language of attacker ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	0	6	3

Non-Consensual Language ("forced," "grabbed," "incapacitated")	3	2	0
Suggestions that the attacker scouted for his victim or planned attack	1	2	1
Attacker's previous violent encounters	0	2	0
Language that points to the attacker knowing what he was doing (ignored protests, threatened victim, etc.)	0	4	5
Extraneous information that benefits survivor	1	3	0

Negative Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Statistics used to either victim blame or cover up rape (number of false reports, number of cases of women who are attacked when walking alone at night, etc.)	1	0	0
Victim described as guilty	2	0	2
Rapist described as innocent	18	11	5
Sexualized Survivor	0	0	3
Sexualized rapist (He/She is too attractive to rape someone, etc.)	4	0	0
Shameful language from victim ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	0	1	0
Number of times the word "victim" is used	6	5	25

Consensual Language ("engaged in," "fondle," "oral sex")	11	3	9
Suggestions that the victim could have prevented the attack	7	1	0
Extraneous information that benefits Attacker	17	3	0
Victim's sexuality or sexual history included	1	0	0

Article 1, approved and published by the Washington Post, had the most negative language out of the three. Beginning with the title describing Turner, the attacker, as an All-American athlete to the article which continued to describe him as baby-faced and emphasized his success in his swimming career. A large portion of the article also described his side of the story: that he was having a one night stand with a woman he met at a party and who verbally gave consent various times. Turner is also described as a victim when the two exchange students restrained him and held him down to the point where Turner was unable to move or escape. The victim's side of that night was not discussed in depth except to state that her story is different and that she was intoxicated to the point of unconsciousness until 3 hours after the attack.

Article 2, approved and published by the New York Times, had the most positive language out of the three. This article instead of focusing on Turner's swim careers, as many articles have, this article focused on the rape itself. Details that some articles left out such as that Turner attempted to get a few girls alone before he found his victim and that the victim was unconscious when the two exchange students stopped the attack causing Brock Turner to run away from the scene.

Article 3, approved and published by the Stanford Daily, is the local paper I used for this research. This article was in the middle out of the three in terms of negative and positive language with a slight favoring for negative language. Certain phrases in this article did hint at victim blaming, however, Brock Turner was described as guilty a little more often.

Case 2: Cory Batey AKA Former Vanderbilt Football Player

In this case, Cory Batey was one of the attackers in a gang rape of an unconscious woman in a dorm room at Vanderbilt university. All the attackers were football players but Batey's trial was followed more closely. The attackers recorded the attack and took photos which were distributed during and after the rape. The rape ended after Batey urinated on the victim and then tossed her outside the dorm room with the other attackers. He was first found guilty and sentenced to 15 years (the minimum for this charge). However, when the defense learned that the foreman on the jury was a victim of statutory rape, the judge declared a mistrial. These articles are on Batey's retrial in which he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Article 1: Washington Post article titled, "Former Vanderbilt football player found guilty of raping a student who had blacked out"

Article 2: USA Today article titled, "Cory Batey sentenced to 15 years in Vanderbilt rape case"

Article 3: Tennessean article titled, "Cory Batey found guilty of aggravated rape in retrial"

Positive Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Described the victim as innocent	13	8	12
Rapist is described as guilty	8	4	19
Language does not put the victim in danger (Giving full name, school, work location, etc.)	0	0	0

Shameful language of attacker ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	0	2	0
Sexualized victim	0	0	0
Non-Consensual Language ("forced," "grabbed," "incapacitated")	7	2	5
Suggestions that the attacker scouted for his victim or planned attack	0	0	1
Attacker's previous violent encounters	0	0	0
Language that points to the attacker knowing what he was doing (ignored protests, threatened victim, etc.)	4	2	4
Extraneous information that benefits survivor	5	3	0

Negative Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Statistics used to either victim blame or cover up rape (number of false reports, number of cases of women who are attacked when walking alone at night, etc.)	0	0	0
Victim described as guilty	0	0	4
Rapist described as innocent	5	4	13
Sexualized Attacker	0	0	2
Shameful language from victim ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	0	0	1
Number of times the word "victim" is used	10	6	2
Consensual Language ("engaged	0	0	0

in," "fondle," "oral sex")			
Suggestions that the victim could have prevented the attack	0	0	0
Extraneous information that benefits Attacker	1	1	1
Victim's sexuality or sexual history included	0	0	0

All three of these articles, as well as the many more I viewed in this research, were heavy on blaming the attacker with only a few instances of victim blaming. All three had exactly one piece of extraneous information that benefits the attacker which included mentioning Corey Batey missing his daughter and wanting to go back to her. Article two, the USA Today article, even mentioned what the defendant was wearing while in court, an orange prison uniform. This article not only stated the piece of clothing that Batey wore during trial that made him look like a criminal but also did not state at all what the victim wore. Article three described the Batey as innocent the most amount of times, mainly through quotes of his side of that night. However, article three also described Corey Batey as guilty the most out of the three articles at 19 separate instances. None of the three articles implied that the victim could have prevented the attack nor used consensual language.

Drinking vs Drugged

The second factor I analyzed is how a case is portrayed depending on whether the victim willingly drank alcohol relative to a victim that was unwillingly drugged. Both these cases occurred in 2014 and the victims were in high school, 16 years old, at the time of the attack. Case one is the steubenville case in which the victim willingly drank alcohol before she was attacked. Case two is the #jadapose case in which the victim was drugged before she was attacked.

Articles one and two are national newspaper outlets. The third article used for both cases is a local paper.

Case 3: Steubenville Case

In this case, the victim went to an end of the school year house party in which there was underage drinking. That night while the victim was too intoxicated to consent or resist, she was taken to several parties with two football players. Photos of the victim undressed and being touched by the two attackers were also posted online. This case was controversial because of the reaction it gained in the small town of Steubenville. While part of the town felt that the girl was a victim in a sexual assault, the rest of the town blamed the girl for ruining the careers/futures of the attackers.

Article 1: USA Today article titled, "Steubenville rape case driven by social media"

Article 2: New York Times article titled, "Rape Case Unfolds on Web and Splits City"

Article 3: The Blade article titled, "Defense attacks girl's character in Steubenville rape case"

Positive Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Described the victim as innocent	1	12	0
Rapist is described as guilty	6	19	4
Language does not put the victim in danger (Giving full name, school, work location, etc.)	0	0	0
Shameful language of attacker ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	2	11	2
Sexualized victim	0	0	0
Non-Consensual Language ("forced," "grabbed," "incapacitated")	4	13	3

Suggestions that the attacker scouted for his victim or planned attack	1	5	1
Attacker's previous violent encounters	0	0	0
Language that points to the attacker knowing what he was doing (ignored protests, threatened victim, etc.)	4	11	2
Extraneous information that benefits survivor	2		

Negative Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Statistics used to either victim blame or cover up rape (number of false reports, number of cases of women who are attacked when walking alone at night, etc.)	0	0	0
Victim described as guilty	2	8	12
Rapist described as innocent	1	3	1
Sexualized Attacker	0	0	0
Shameful language from victim ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	2	0	3
Number of times the word "victim" is used	4	2	1
Consensual Language ("engaged in," "fondle," "oral sex")	1	0	2
Suggestions that the victim could have prevented the attack	2	3	6
Extraneous information that benefits Attacker	0	7	2
Victim's sexuality or sexual history included	0	0	3

Article two, the New York Times article, had the highest amount of positive language out of the three articles. This article focused on the details of the case as well as the social media controversy that hit afterwards. Multiple statements from those who support the victim and those who blame the victim were shown in this article. However, the New York Times also made it a point to portray the victim statements of others in a way that this media outlet does not personally believe. For example, by relaying the details of the rape after a statement of a coach defending the attackers.

Article three, the Blade article, had the highest number of victim blaming language. This article pointed out multiple times that the victim had a history of underage drinking before the attack. A quote from one of the victim's friends was also added to this article stating that the victim was told not to leave with the attackers but that she left anyway. This article contained various subtle examples of victim blaming, with a couple very blatant examples.

Case 4: #jadapose

In this case, the victim went to a house party in which there was also underage drinking. The victim, Jada, was drugged that night and woke up the next morning with no memory of what occurred the night before. That night she was raped by two male classmates while she was unconscious. Images of Jada unconscious without clothes from the waist down spread through social media. These images then became a popular meme with the hashtag "jadapose" in which social media users mocked the girl's position in the picture.

Article 1: CNN article titled, "#IamJada: When abuse becomes a teen meme"

Article 2: Washington Post titled, "How a 16-year-old rape victim becomes an Internet meme"

Article 3: Houston Post titled, "Suspects Arrested, Charged in #Jadapose Rape Case"

Positive Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Described the victim as innocent	8	5	5
Rapist is described as guilty	3	7	10
Language does not put the victim in danger (Giving full name, school, work location, etc.)	0	0	0
Shameful language of attacker ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	1	2	4
Sexualized victim	0	3	2
Non-Consensual Language ("forced," "grabbed," "incapacitated")	4	4	5
Suggestions that the attacker scouted for his victim or planned attack	0	2	2
Attacker's previous violent encounters	0	0	3
Language that points to the attacker knowing what he was doing (ignored protests, threatened victim, etc.)	2	4	4
Extraneous information that benefits survivor	5	3	0

Negative Language Used	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
Statistics used to either victim blame or cover up rape (number of false reports, number of cases of women who are attacked when walking alone at night, etc.)	1	0	0
Victim described as guilty	0	1	1

Rapist described as innocent	0	0	0
Sexualized Attacker	0	0	0
Shameful language from victim ("alleged," "admits," "confesses")	1	0	2
Number of times the word "victim" is used	5	4	0
Consensual Language ("engaged in," "fondle," "oral sex")	3	1	0
Suggestions that the victim could have prevented the attack	1	1	1
Extraneous information that benefits Attacker	0	0	1
Victim's sexuality or sexual history included	2	2	0

All three articles contained a large amount of positive language. All of these articles focused on the social media bullying that occurred to Jada. They also emphasized how she was able to speak out for other rape victims and spread her message. Article three, the Houston Post, did not use the word "victim" at all which is the only article out of all the ones I have read in my research. The Houston Post article was also the only article out of the three that mentioned the attackers' previous sexual assaults.

The focus of news media that is broadcasted to the mass public at an alarming rate is not only primarily targeted to blame the victim but also perpetuates the rape myth in the United States. By coding newspaper articles published to the mass media, the language to describe a white athletic assailant was different from an African American athletic assailant. Both cases were extremely similar with concrete evidence that the assailant committed the assault (videos for Batey and a witness interrupting the attack for Turner) yet they were portrayed differently.

The language was also slightly different in a teenage victim that willingly drank alcohol and one that was drugged. Again, these two cases were extremely similar, yet the Steubenville case, in which the victim was drunk, received more victim blame language compared to the #jadapose case. In cases where the victim was drinking alcohol yet was not able to give consent, there was slightly more blame placed and more language that suggested that the victim could have prevented the attack. Consider this. If the language used in newspaper articles to describe the Cory Batey case were used to also describe Brock Turner in the Washington Post article, then those who felt Turner was innocent after reading that article would have different perspective on the case. If the language used in newspaper articles to describe the #jadapose case were used to describe the Steubenville case, then those who felt that the Steubenville victim provoked/deserved to be attacked for drinking alcohol would have a different perspective on the case and consent. Through subtle language, news media outlets have distorted rape cases to continue this societal cycle of blaming rape victims and accusing them of enjoying the attack.

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