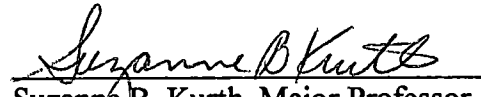
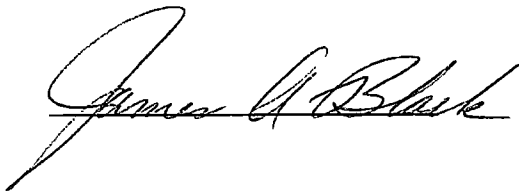


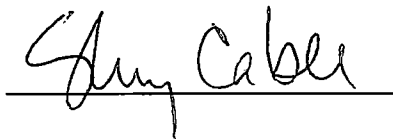
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Amy Nicole McNeal entitled "Presentation of Rape: A Content Analysis of Newspaper Reports." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Sociology.


Suzanne B. Kurth, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:





Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

PRESENTATION OF RAPE:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER REPORTS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Amy Nicole McNeal
May 1999

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with thanks to Dave Harrison,
for his support, love, encouragement, and laughter.

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ABSTRACT

Rape is a serious social problem that affects many American women. Although knowledge about rape has increased during the past few decades, stereotypes and myths about rape continue to exist. One reason these may persist is if newspaper reports of rape present a distorted version of the truth. The media may reflect societal beliefs and/or shape them. Media accounts of rape may support rape myths, which in turn support society's rape culture. This study examined articles published during January, March, May, July, September, and November of 1998 in The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, and The Washington Post. A keyword search was used to identify articles to be included in the sample. Content analysis was performed on 109 articles to establish whether certain characteristics, including the age, gender, race and occupation of victims and perpetrators; whether or not the names of victims and perpetrators were published; and if newspaper reports perpetuated stereotypes or contained rape myths. The analysis indicates that when a rape is reported in the news, it is either a sensational rape or promotes stereotypes of rape and its victims.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rape is a crime that affects many women in the United States. Cultural attitudes toward rape may both support and reflect the continued dominance of men over women. News reports of rape may contain stereotypes and perpetuate rape myths. Culturally defined notions of gender dominance underlie these stereotypes and myths and lead people to denigrate the victims of rape. People may believe rape victims are to blame for their assaults and that only convicted felons or mentally ill individuals commit rape. Women may come to accept rape myths, and believe that they are not at risk of rape if they do not engage in certain behaviors, such as walking alone at night, flirting with men, or dressing in short skirts. Investigations of the role of the media suggest that news reporting of crime may shape the way people view crime, as well as increase their fear of crime. Research that has analyzed the presentation of rape in women's magazines and television dramas has concentrated on the use of rape myths.

Statement of the Research Problem

Newspaper accounts are examined to see whether they reflect and thus perpetuate stereotypes and myths of rapists and their victims, they refute widely held stereotypes and myths, or they create new stereotypes and rape myths. Due to time and space constraints, daily newspapers can offer only limited information about current events. The selective representation of crimes with certain characteristics may lead the public to discount or ignore certain types of crimes and crime victims that are not given much coverage. For

example, only five percent of rapes are reported in the news, compared to 70% of murders, even though rape occurs more frequently than murder (Meyers 1997).

Comparison of aggregate data on rape with its presentation in four major metropolitan newspapers provides one way to address questions of whether the media report rapes at the level at which they officially occur and how they portray them. If stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about rape are not countered, rape will continue to be a serious and largely unrecognized problem in our society.

Significance of the Problem

Violent crime has become a routine feature of modern life (Cerulo 1998). Sexual aggression is the fastest growing violent crime in the United States, and the United States has the highest incidence rate of forcible rape of any industrialized country (Wood 1997: 313; Allison and Wrightsman 1993: 11). Approximately 1.9 million women are physically assaulted every year in the United States, and one of six women and one of 33 men in the United States has experienced an attempted or completed rape (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998). Rapes occur on dates, at parties, at chance encounters, or in planned circumstances (Martin and Hummer 1989). Young people may encounter rape more frequently, as one in three teenagers reported knowing a victim of an acquaintance rape (Cerulo 1998:1). A recent victimization survey conducted by the United States Department of Justice indicates that 22% of the women who reported being raped were under twelve years old, and 32% were twelve to seventeen years old at the time of the attack (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Various forms of sexual assault exist, and rape is the most serious form.

Stereotypes and myths about rape are common in our society. The myths may lead people to blame the victim of rape. People may adhere to stereotypes and myths because the media present only those rapes that fit traditional gender beliefs. Or, newspaper coverage of rape may reflect cultural beliefs about rape, thus presenting stereotypical accounts. Media coverage may create disproportionate fear of certain types of rape by presenting only the most serious, and thus most newsworthy, crimes and lessen concern about more frequent types of rapes. People who rely on newspapers for most of their information about rape may have rape stereotypes and rape myths reinforced, if only certain types of rapes are covered.

Rape and Sexual Assault

Definition

Men commit the majority of sexual assaults and overwhelmingly target women as the victims (Johnson and Sigler 1997). Sexual assault involves sexual activity that occurs without the informed consent of at least one of the parties involved (Wood 1997; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). Rape is a form of sexual assault; a sexual event that occurs without the victim's consent, and involves the use or threat of force to penetrate the victim's vagina or anus by penis, tongue, fingers, or an object, or the victim's mouth by penis (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998). The lack of consent condition is met when one of the partners is unable to give it. For example, if a woman's mental abilities are hindered

by alcohol or other drugs, or if she has a mental disability, she cannot legally give consent to sexual activity. Forcing sex on a woman unable to give consent constitutes sexual assault (Wood 1997). Whatever the social relationship (friend, date, or spouse), any forced sexual activity is sexual assault.

Sexual assault may be classified into four types (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). The first is sexual contact, which is unwanted sex play that arises from intimidating verbal pressure, the misuse of authority, threats of harm, or physical force. The second type is sexual coercion, which is unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of threatening verbal pressure or the abuse of authority. A third type is attempted rape, which is attempted unwanted intercourse, resulting from the use of threats of force or the use of drugs and alcohol. The fourth type is rape, which is unwanted intercourse or other sex acts obtained by force or threats of force, or by the use of drugs and alcohol (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). Although not designated as a category by Schwartz and DeKeseredy, statutory rape is a fifth category of rape. Statutory rape is the unlawful carnal knowledge with someone under the legal age of consent. The legal age of consent is usually 16 or 18, and varies according to state laws (Koupal 1999). Although in most statutory rape cases the perpetrator is over 18, sometimes the perpetrator may also be a minor. The category of statutory rape reflects the importance of being able to give consent. Young children, whether female or male, may experience sexual abuse which may be treated as if it were rape because of the belief that they are not able to give consent.

Predisposing and Facilitative Conditions

Research on sexual assault indicates that under certain facilitative conditions, sexual assault is more likely to occur. Some of the predisposing conditions for perpetrators are membership in certain all-male groups (such as fraternities or gangs), alcohol and drug use, and, in some cases, the nature of the relationship with the victim.

All-Male Peer Group Membership

Group membership may lead people to engage in acts of group conformity. Group norms may support behavior judged deviant in the larger culture. Groups composed of all or mostly males may display deviant behavior patterns. Boeringer, Shehan, and Akers (1991) suggest that sexual aggression is a normative behavior within fraternities, and because of this, members do not define sexual aggression as morally or situationally wrong. Fraternity members are frequently associated with types of sexual coercion that they may not define as rape but fit legal definitions of sexual assault (Martin and Hummer 1989). Other all- or mostly-male peer groups, such as street gangs or athletic teams, show similar attitudes and behavior patterns. Individuals who belong to such groups are more likely to hold attitudes about sexual behavior that debase women, accept casual sex, and condone forced sex. Members of these groups presumably will be the perpetrators of sexual assault and aggression more often than those with no male group affiliation (Boeringer, Shehan, and Akers 1991; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

Substance Use

Alcohol use and abuse may facilitate sexual assault. Alcohol is the drug most commonly used by sexual predators (Saum 1998). In addition, victims of rape are themselves frequently under the influence of alcohol or other drugs at the time of the assault (Saum 1998). Rapists may encourage prospective victims to increase their use of alcohol and/or drugs to inhibit their coordination and impair their judgement. Substance use is frequently involved in some types of sexual assaults. One study found that 75% of the men and 55% of the women involved in acquaintance rape had been drinking or taking drugs prior to the incident (Ward, Chapman, Cohn, White, and Williams 1991).

Alcohol produces observable changes in men's and women's behavior, and such changes in women's behaviors may increase their risk of victimization (Parks, Miller, Collins, and Zetes-Zanatta 1998). Behavior changes include increased aggressiveness, along with changes associated with intoxication such as stumbling, falling asleep on the bar, getting sick, bumping into people, leaving alone, talking to someone she normally would not, or having her purse open. In addition, women may display sexually provocative behaviors such as rubbing against men, being flirtatious, dancing seductively, and dressing in skimpy clothes. These behaviors may convey openness to sexual advances and/or vulnerability for victimization. A sober person's behavior may signal vulnerability to a potential perpetrator; therefore, an intoxicated individual, who has less control over his or her body and diminished judgement, may be at an even higher risk of attack (Parks, Miller, Collins, and Zetes-Zanatta 1998).

In addition to alcohol, other drugs may be covertly administered to cloud women's judgement. Potential rapists may even slip sedatives into their targets' drinks

(University of Tennessee Student Health Service 1997). Recently, some men have begun using the illegal drug Rohypnol to obtain sex from women. Rohypnol has been designated the "date rape drug," meaning that a potential rapist will slip the drug into someone's drink, and then rape that person. Intended as a sleeping pill, side effects of Rohypnol include slurred speech, disorientation, drunken behavior, blackouts, disinhibition, and temporary anterograde amnesia. The user falls into a deeply relaxed, semi-conscious state, yet is unable to move his or her limbs or perform other physical activities (McKenry and Salerno 1991; Seligmann and King 1996). The perpetrator rapes the victim without resistance, and the victim remembers nothing about the incident (Seligmann and King 1996).

Relationship

Sexual assault occurs between strangers, but victimization studies show that most victims know the perpetrators. Forced sex between two people who know each other is the most common form of sexual violence (Ward 1995). Despite the prevailing stereotype of violent stranger rape, about 85% of rape victims have some sort of relationship with their rapists (Allison and Wrightsman 1993: 51). The relationship may be casual or intimate. In most acquaintance rape cases, the perpetrator is only a casual acquaintance. Friends, boyfriends, or husbands are the perpetrators in other cases (Ellis 1989). Between one-sixth and one-half of college undergraduates have experienced physical aggression from a dating partner (Thompson 1991).

Stereotypes, Rape Myths, and Victim Blame

Despite changes in public awareness, stereotypes and myths about rape and its victims abound. Meyers (1997) argues that the predominant problems with news coverage of violent crimes against women (such as reinforcing stereotypes and myths) lie within the social structures and values of society.

Stereotypes

A stereotype is a preconceived notion about a person or group of persons, based on their real or perceived group membership (Snyder 1991). Stereotypes allow people to recognize and categorize similarities about different situations. Stereotypes are not inherently problematic, but placing someone into a negative category, based on stereotypes, may be harmful. Initial impressions of people, based on visible characteristics such as gender or race, may be shaped by assumptions associated with those characteristics. The attitudes of other people, the behavior of those who are stereotyped, and cultural representations of stereotyped groups may serve to reinforce prevailing stereotypes and maintain the association of certain traits and behaviors with certain types of people (Snyder 1991).

Stereotypes about rape usually involve the rapist and the rape itself. According to popular stereotypes, a typical rapist is an African-American male, who is psychotic, sex-starved, hostile toward women, and physically and sexually aggressive, and attacks an innocent woman he does not know (Johnson and Sigler 1997). Stereotypes of rape are ideas about what commonly occurs when a rape is committed. According to popular stereotypes, most rapes take place at night in an unsafe, deserted place in the inner city.

Colleen Ward (1995) argues that the most widely held stereotype of rape has several of the components mentioned above: rape is a crime of sexual passion that occurs between strangers in unsafe public places and involves physical force and victim resistance.

Stereotypes may have some basis in reality. Yet, the composite stereotype of rape outlined by Ward is contrary to most cases of rape, which are personal crimes that occur between people who know each other, may take place in the victim's home, and do not always involve physical violence (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998). A typical rape scenario presented in selected media, especially television dramas, is a sexually motivated stranger attacking a young, physically desirable woman (Allison and Wrightsman 1993; Brinson 1992).

Rape Myths

“Rape myths are prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, or rapists” (Burt 1998: 129). Rape myths serve to trivialize sexual violence (Ward 1995). Rape myths are interwoven with cultural stereotypes of ideal behavior for men and women, and people learn them the same way they learn other attitudes and beliefs (Brinson 1992; Burt 1998). Attitudes toward rape victims are strongly linked to attitudes toward women in general. Rape myths are prevalent in patriarchal societies, and the tendency to blame and belittle women is at the core of these misconceptions (Ward 1995). These myths support the use of violence, and violence is coupled with sexuality becomes a mechanism for keeping women powerless (Burt 1998). Belief in rape myths affects labeling and reporting of the crime, as well as people’s reaction to rape victims

and perpetrators, and therefore their attributions of blame to the victims and perpetrators (Workman and Orr 1996).

Rape myths may be classified into four categories (Burt 1998). The first group of rape myths includes those that indicate that nothing happened. This category of rape myths concentrates on the belief that rape is impossible, and therefore does not exist. In some instances, the occurrence of sex at all may be denied. People who accept these myths believe that a woman cannot be raped against her will, and that she is morally responsible for submitting to the rapist. Defense attorneys in rape trials may draw on this type of myth, claiming that the rape was simply fantasy or wishful thinking. In other cases, people may believe that women charge rape as revenge against men who have mistreated them (Burt 1998).

The second types of rape myth denies that harm was done (Burt 1998). Rape myths included in this category focus on rape victims who are neither virgins nor currently married. The general argument is that if the woman has already had sex, and the rape does not interfere with her marital relationship, then it is just sex, and no one has been hurt. These myths are based on the idea that a woman's value is equated with her status as sexual property, and if she is not "owned" (by her father or her husband), rape does not decrease her worth (Burt 1998).

The third category of rape myths includes those that claim the victim desired the rape (Burt 1998). Any myths that imply the woman wanted, invited, or liked the rape are included in this category. Some of these myths focus on the woman's responsibility for stimulating a man sexually. Phrases such as "All women want to be raped" or "Women cannot prevent rape so they might as well lay back and enjoy it" are examples of these

myths (Schwendinger 1983; Ward 1995). This set of myths also includes the belief that rape is a result of sexual desire, rather than an expression of violence and dominance. A myth such as "He could not control his sexual passion" is an example of this type (Schwendinger 1983; Ward 1995). A derivative rape myth would be that rape only occurs when the victim is seriously injured resisting her attacker (Brinson 1992). If the victim has been injured, she may be able to "prove" that a rape occurred.

The fourth group of rape myths includes those that maintain that the victim deserved the rape by doing something to provoke the rapist (Burt 1998). Although the third and fourth categories are similar, the distinction is that the myths in fourth category acknowledge that sex was forced, but suggest that the woman did something to cause it. (The third category claims that although the woman did not explicitly agree to sex, she did enjoy it and did not try to stop it). The fourth category includes myths that are associated with the victims' clothing or physical appearance. Some types of clothing, such as short skirts or tight shirts, may be seen as symbolic of sexual promiscuity. If a rape victim is wearing an item considered inappropriate for a "good" or sexually prudent woman at the time of the attack, she may be blamed for being promiscuous or giving the appearance of being promiscuous. Women who dress and behave in what may be deemed a suggestive manner are perceived as more likely to be raped than women who dress and behave conservatively (Workman and Orr 1996).

Increasing numbers of women may engage in behaviors that might lead to their being held responsible if they are raped. Another example, which would fit in the fourth category, is a rape victim who had consumed alcohol prior to the attack; she is more likely to be blamed for the attack than a sober woman. The myth is that women who

drink know the risks and anything that happens is their responsibility. An intoxicated woman who flirts with a man, and is raped, is to blame for "asking for it." Women are seen as deserving the rape if they do not restrict their activities, even if they had no other options. For example, if a woman is out late at night, whether she works a late shift, accepts a ride from a stranger, or her car breaks down, the rape is viewed as her fault.

Blaming the Victim

Belief in rape myths presents many problems. One problem is that victims may have internalized these myths and blame themselves, adding to the rape trauma (Ward 1995). Another problem is the way rape victims are treated by those who accept rape myths. The victim may endure secondary victimization from doctors, police, the court system, and even friends and family members who believe rape myths (Schwendinger 1983). Secondary victimization leads to another consequence: the lack of reporting. If a woman is afraid of people's reactions, she may decline to report the rape to authorities. Police crime reports and victimization reports show great discrepancies; the incidence of rape is higher than what is reported to the police (Johnson and Sigler 1997).

Blaming the victim of a crime attributes responsibility for the crime to the victim rather than the perpetrator. Victim blaming implies that the victim's behavior provoked the perpetrator, and the victim somehow deserved victimization, or that an inherent flaw or weakness of the victim caused the victimization (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). The victims of rape are blamed more frequently than victims of other crimes. If someone's home is burglarized or if a person is robbed, the victim is seldom blamed for the crime (Burt 1998). Few people would assert that the victims of robbery "asked for it" because

they were walking in a bad neighborhood, or that they "invited burglary" because they left their doors unlocked. However, the same situations are used to shift blame to the victims of rape. Myths about rape create a hostile climate for rape victims, providing bases for excusing the perpetrator and blaming the victim (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). Assertions such as "Victims are 'loose' women who provoke rapists," "A woman who goes to a man's house on the first date implies she is willing to have sex," or "Women secretly want to be raped" reflect rape myths that blame the victim (Benedict 1994: 10).

Certain circumstances affect the inclination to blame the victim in a rape case. Variables that increase the tendency to blame the victim include suggestive dress, previous sexual experience, level of attractiveness, acquaintance with the attacker, and initiation of the date (Whatley and Riggio 1993). A commonly used explanation for this tendency is Lerner's just world hypothesis. This hypothesis states, simply, that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Whatley and Riggio 1993). The just world hypothesis helps justify the perpetrator's actions: the victim obviously did something to deserve being raped, so the perpetrator cannot be completely at fault. Second, it helps people, especially women, allay their own fears of being victimized. According to this framework, a woman would think that if another woman was raped, she deserved it because she was sexually active and wore suggestive clothing. Therefore, dressing conservatively and having sex only in monogamous relationships would reduce the danger of being raped because these actions are the opposite of the rape victim's (Whatley and Riggio 1993). Victim responsibility is negatively correlated with the victim's perceived likeability and intelligence; victims of perceived high moral character

are attributed less responsibility, and perceived victim responsibility increases as respectability decreases (Ward 1995). Women who have more prestigious occupations may be perceived to be more respectable than women who are unemployed or hold lower status occupations (Meyers 1997).

In sum, rape myths include the belief that victims are young, careless, beautiful women who invite rape; victims are “loose” women who provoke rapists; any woman can avoid rape if she resists enough; a woman who goes to a man’s house or invites him to her house on the first date implies she is willing to have sex and is inviting rape if she refuses; women can do little to prevent rape; women change their minds about sex and change rape and women secretly want to be raped. On the other hand, rapists are sex-starved men who do not have a sex life; otherwise decent men are spurred to rape by the clothing and behavior of women; and rapists act on uncontrollable sexual impulses (Benedict 1994).

The focus of this study is on whether the news media provide broad coverage of rape and incorporate rape stereotypes and myths in reports of rape. Thus the role of the media requires exploration.

News Media and Crime

The mass media communicate messages and symbols to the general public (Achbar 1994). Reporting every event that occurs every day is not possible; journalists are usually constrained by costs and lack of power (Gans 1979). News writers have certain considerations that they must regard before writing a story: audience desires; organizational demands; competition; novelty, quality, and importance of an event; and

their own values and ethics (Gans 1979). News reporters and news editors always engage in selective representation. Debate exists about how certain events are deemed newsworthy, and others not fit to print. One argument is that gatekeepers in the news industry shape public opinion by deciding to print some stories and leaving others out. Another argument is that public opinion shapes reporting habits by creating a demand for certain types of information.

Those who see the media as shapers argue that the media strongly influence how people perceive various events and occurrences in the world around them. The public is never fully informed, as the media control the information the public receives. News workers cover, select, and disseminate stories defined as interesting or important (Tuchman 1978). The media's vast control increases the chance of misrepresentation of individuals and world events. If a news report is biased, the public's perception probably will be biased (Combs and Slovic 1979). People do not usually have direct experience with the stories they read, so they may have no way of knowing whether a report is biased or neutral (Sacco 1982). Therefore, the news media shape or construct public opinion by providing people with information they think they should hear.

Shaping can take many forms. For example, a change in emphasis from one account to another can alter the perception of an entire event. Emphasis may be altered by deleting a reference to an occurrence, by omitting significant details, or by adding more detailed information about part of the event (Humphries 1981; Meyers 1997). Susan Smith (1984) suggests that the press might be responsible for shaping public awareness and creating an alternate reality. Social norms guide reporting, and in turn news reports define norms of society (Tuchman 1978). News stories may prevent or

discourage people from acting and speaking in ways disapproved of by those in power.

A certain viewpoint is presented as the widely accepted norm, and people are encouraged to conform to that norm (Gans 1979). What is reported may play a role in social change by presenting deviant acts to the public. For example, the routine reporting of violence may construct social opinion rather than reflect it (Cerulo 1998). Carolyn Byerly (1994) proposes that better reporting of rape cases was largely responsible for an increase in public support for rape victims' rights. On the other hand, the news media may downplay the extent of crime through underreporting (Meyers 1997). Although reporters may not deliberately misinform the public, what they report does shape the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of those who consume their reports.

Others do not believe that the media shape public opinion, but instead that public opinion determines what is newsworthy. That is, media reports have meaning or significance only if the public invests interest in them (Smith 1984). Vincent Sacco (1982) asserts that the mass media reinforce attitudes and behavioral predispositions of people. Events that make the news are those that meet the general public's criteria of interest and importance (Bogart 1984). Readers respond to stories based on their relevance, importance, or human interest (Bogart 1984).

Changes in society and in public opinion may shape the type of news that is reported because news is culturally defined, and reflects society's predominant values and assumptions (Meyers 1997). Descriptions of crime, criminals, and victims have changed over time to correspond with social, political, and economic changes in society (Meyers 1997). As Byerly (1994) argued, rape reporting was changed by the feminist movement.

Changes in reporting of rape over time may indicate that cultural values affect media coverage.

Perceptions of crime may be more subject to media influence than some other aspects of social life. Many people use the news media to obtain information about areas of the social world with which they have no direct contact. People seldom have direct contact with criminal activity, so they are more likely to gain information about crime from the media; specifically, the news media (newspapers or television news reports) (Surette 1998). In one study, 95% of respondents cited news media as the primary source of crime knowledge (Graber 1980). In another study, slightly more people reported depending on their local newspaper, rather than television or radio, as their main source of information (Smith 1984).

Of all stories classified as local news, 22% are crime stories (Bogart 1984). Crime reporting is an area in which media misrepresentation occurs frequently (Sacco 1982). News reports fail to accurately present crime statistics issued by the police (Smith 1984). Smith (1984) reports that the public is more inclined to hold beliefs about crime that are similar to those trends described in news reports, rather than official crime statistics. Furthermore, individuals whose major source of information was their local newspaper were more likely to believe crime rates were higher, and to rate the local crime problem as more serious than it was (Smith 1984). Violent crimes comprise only about one fifth of annual police reports (Humphries 1981). However, routine coverage of crime exaggerates the incidence of serious crimes and minimizes the impact of minor, nonviolent offenses (Humphries 1981). More serious crimes, such as homicide, are reported more frequently, even though they occur less frequently than other crimes

(Smith 1984). In addition, the chance of being a victim of a property crime (e.g., burglary) is much higher than the chance of being murdered or raped. However, people report more fear of violent crimes, which may be due to media reporting.

Media and the Typical Rape

The general public holds the common misperception that most rapes are vicious, predatory rapes, in which a woman (usually alone and scantily clothed) is attacked late at night by a stranger (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). This misperception is in part based on the overreporting of this type of rape by the media, a distortion that may desensitize people and thus encourage violence against women (Meyers 1997). Victimization studies and police reports have proven this stereotype of rape to be invalid. Most rapes are acquaintance rapes and may involve less violence than rape stereotypes commonly attribute to them. Humphries (1981) reasons that newspapers exaggerate the incidence of violence and project stereotypes, which may perpetuate those stereotypes. Women may underestimate the likelihood they are potential victims of acquaintance rape, and may not take precautions to prevent themselves from being raped. A woman may take extreme care to lock her doors and avoid walking outside alone at night, but may not think twice about inviting a man she has just met into her home.

Media representations of the victim may affect whether or not people blame the victim for rape. Marian Meyers (1997) argues eight aspects of media presentations affect the probability that the public might blame a rape victim. The first is portraying the victims as deviant individuals. That is, any woman who deviates from traditional gender expectations (e.g., by going to bars alone) is somehow at fault for being raped. A second

condition is knowing the assailant. The closer the relationship, the more the victim is blamed. A third situation in which the victim is blamed is when the perpetrator does not use a weapon. If no weapon is present, the woman should be able to resist the perpetrator and avoid being raped. The fourth and fifth characteristics involve the victim's race and ethnicity. When the victim and the perpetrator are of different races, especially when an African-American man rapes a white woman, the victim receives less blame. The sixth situation occurs when both parties are of the same socioeconomic class. If a lower class male rapes a middle or upper class female, he is blamed for the attack. The seventh condition involves the victim's age. If a woman is young, but not a child, she is perceived as more blameworthy. Finally, the victim's attractiveness is considered. The more attractive the victim, the more likely she is to be faulted for provoking the act. Females who are represented as wholly undeserving of violence are usually either very young or very old, those whose attack had been particularly brutal, or those who were attacked by a serial rapist or someone classified as mentally ill (Meyers 1997).

If the media shape the public's view of crime in general, news reports definitely shape cognitions of rape, particularly related to blame or responsibility (Byerly 1994). Language shapes people's world view, and can be used in ways that avoid issues of blame and responsibility (Lamb and Keon 1995). Lamb and Keon (1995) explored the writing styles of reports of violence against women and found that authors wrote in a way that did not assign responsibility to men as perpetrators. Rather, four linguistic devices are commonly used to diffuse responsibility for these crimes: use of passive voice, use of the couple as the agent, nominalization of the act, and obfuscation of gender (Lamb and Keon 1995).

Using the passive voice places emphasis on the harm that has been done, rather than the perpetrator of that harm. In this way, the article becomes ambiguous, and focus is directed away from the male perpetrator. The word “raped” appears more frequently in the passive voice when compared to other verbs. Furthermore, newspaper reports of rape may manipulate language so that rape is easily confused with lovemaking (Lamb and Keon 1995). Another method of displacing responsibility is to use language that implies shared responsibility. Reports of violence against women may make the responsible party unclear. In addition, nominalization (using words like “the battery” or “the violence”) or gender obfuscation (using words such as “victim”, “assailant”, or “perpetrator”) further blur the attribution of responsibility for the crime (Lamb and Keon 1995: 212). The use of any of these language devices may create the impression that male violence in a relationship is a couples’ problem or a relationship issue. Men are not assigned blame or responsibility for their violent actions (Lamb and Keon 1995). In these ways, the myth that women are in some way to blame for their own rapes is reinforced through news reporting.

In contrast, the public’s acceptance of rape myths may be seen as shaping news accounts of rape. The news media increasingly have turned their attention to rape and its victims. In 1937, the New York Times created a new index category of sex crimes, and published 143 articles about the topic that year. By 1974, the number of rape stories in the newspaper had increased more than 250% (Byerly 1994: 62). Although the topic has received recognition in national newspapers for over half a century, the quality of the analysis may not have improved. Byerly (1994) argues that rape cannot be understood without examining traditional gender roles, particularly male dominance. Yet, the

mainstream news media rarely acknowledges that sexual scripts in our society lead men to view women as objects of prey (Byerly 1994). Byerly attributes this refusal to the traditions that keep most rapes out of the news.

Another problem with rape reporting that Byerly (1994) identifies is the lack of guidelines for such accounts. She points out that news reporting texts, as well as many journalism courses, tend to focus on journalistic routines, skills, and theory. Rarely do they address the substance of the issues and events that the students will someday cover. Most textbooks do not include sexual assault or domestic violence. Some texts include information on sexual assault, but most of these provide little coverage. Those that do include sections on rape usually address the problem of whether and when to name rape victims, but otherwise have no discussion of rape or its reporting. Instead, textbook writers assume that if reporters learn a few basics about victim trauma, they will be able to interview all victims, including those of rape, with equal and accurate skill. Furthermore, textbook authors lump incest, family violence, and rape in the same category, without recognizing the gendered nature of these issues or that victims react with a wide range of feelings (Byerly 1994). If journalists, in their training, are not taught to report rapes and interview victims in a sensitive and realistic manner, erroneous reporting will continue.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

This study examines how rapes are represented currently in selected major city newspapers. Previous research on media representations examined selected magazines and television programs and had somewhat different foci. Specifically, the question addressed is: Do newspaper accounts of rape tend to support stereotypes and myths that discount the seriousness of rape? To answer this question, information included in newspaper accounts is analyzed: (1) The types of rapes covered and amount of space devoted to rape stories (2) The frequency of reporting stranger rapes compared to the frequency of reporting acquaintance rapes, and the nature of those relationships. (3) Personal characteristics of the perpetrator and victim (e.g., age, race, gender, and occupation), especially the names of the victim and the perpetrator. (4) Indication of the perpetrators' prior convictions or criminal record or an all-male peer group (fraternity, street gang, or athletic team) to which the perpetrator belongs. (5) Information that may be used to blame the victim for the rape (e.g., victims' sexual history, style of dress, a history of abuse, or initial agreement to sex). (6) The circumstances surrounding the rape (e.g., location (indoors/outdoors), alcohol and/or drug use, date, time, etc.). (7) Indication of arrests, indictments, charges and/or convictions of the rape, and the type of punishment, if any, the perpetrators receive.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are explored:

- (1) Newspaper accounts of rape do not reflect the frequency with which rape occurs in our society. Overall, newspapers provide limited coverage of incidents of rape.
- (2) Newspaper accounts of rape primarily present rapes which have the characteristics depicted in rape stereotypes and myths.

Summary

Sexual assault takes a number of forms with the most serious form being rape. Stereotypes and myths about rape abound in our society. A commonly held stereotype is that rapes occur late at night in unsafe public places, and the victim is attacked by a stranger who is a bad person. This stereotype contradicts official statistics, which indicate that most rapes occur in the victim's home and are committed by someone the victim knows. Four categories of rape myths can be identified: denial that rape can occur, denial that any harm was inflicted, belief that the rape is a sexual act, and belief that women's actions provoke men to rape. Belief in rape myths may lead people to blame victims for what happens to them. The media may shape or construct the public's views of crimes such as rape or reflect prevailing public beliefs about rape. Some argue the feminist movement stimulated changes in media treatment of rape.

The method, content analysis, used to address the research question is presented in the next chapter. The variables identified in the discussion of predisposing conditions, rape stereotypes, and rape myths guide the analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

To address the question of whether news media at the end of the 20th century perpetuate and/or generate misconceptions about rape, this study examines how often and which rapes are reported in selected newspapers, as well as what information about the rapes is presented. Although several types of news media exist, this study focuses on newspaper accounts, as they are more easily accessible for analysis than other types. In addition, newspapers provide a more permanent record of events than television reports, are more inclusive than television, can be easily reread for content, are more widely distributed than news magazines, and are easier to understand than professional or technical journals. And, while the viewpoint that the majority of people get their news from television is widely accepted, a national survey indicates that as many people receive news from newspapers as from television (Bogart 1984). Furthermore, 53% of people say they do not get enough news from television reports, and turn to newspapers for added details (Bogart 1984: 710). Also, metropolitan papers receive high ratings for their coverage of crimes: 44% of respondents say that their local paper does a "very good job" of reporting crime (Bogart 1984: 714).

Content analysis is an appropriate method to study the constituents of newspaper reports. As a research method, content analysis has some advantages. One advantage is that the study can incorporate long periods of time, yet avoids most time and money constraints. Content analysis permits a larger sample than some other types of research, and the amount of data may be easily reduced or enlarged to fit the researcher's needs.

Another advantage is that the data are permanent; the same words will appear in the same articles each time they are read, which yields consistency in analyzing and reporting findings. Finally, the method does not require any special equipment or technology, is not exceedingly time consuming, and is an unobtrusive approach to studying trends in society (Holsti 1969).

Sample

Four different newspapers were selected as sources for this study, from the largest cities in different regions of the country. These four papers are The Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, and The Atlanta Journal and Constitution. Large city newspapers were chosen because they reach and therefore have the potential to influence large numbers of people, and are likely to reflect broad cultural patterns. Articles were selected from alternate months in 1998 (January, March, May, July, September, and November) to be included in the study.

A search of articles published in 1998 was conducted, using the keyword "rape" to identify articles. The term sexual assault was deemed too broad. The database Lexis-Nexis was accessed, and a keyword search was performed, using the word rape and the title of each newspaper. The keyword search was unsuccessful with the local newspaper, the Knoxville News Sentinel, which had been considered for inclusion in the study due to familiarity with it. The Knoxville News Sentinel was therefore eliminated from this study.

Once the database identified articles, the researcher perused headlines to determine which articles to include in the study. Those articles that were about foreign

countries, reviewed entertainment (movies, plays, books, television programs), reported opening or funding of rape crisis centers, were reprints from other newspapers, reported crime statistics, discussed legal developments or new rape laws, covered appeals of rape trials, were prevention stories, or included rape as an incidental detail (e.g., a convicted felon, who had been imprisoned for rape, escaped from prison) were excluded from the study. Forty-nine percent (N=439) of the articles for 1998 (N=896) were excluded from consideration.

Much coverage of rape in the news media is through trials or arrest reports (Benedict 1994). Therefore, articles that contained news accounts of rape events when they occurred were selected, as well as those that reported an arrest or conviction of a rapist. Also, several news stories reported a serial rapist. Accounts of the same rapist that were published outside of the sample months were added to the sample.

Preliminary coding was conducted for the month of June 1998. June was chosen for initial coding because crime rates, especially for violent personal crimes, are higher in the summer months and a large number of articles was desired. The preliminary coding helped to modify and adjust coding categories and served as a baseline for subsequent analysis of articles. The final sample consisted of articles from six months of 1998, beginning with January. The sample included articles from alternating months to make the number of cases more manageable. The final sample included 109 articles. The breakdown for each paper is shown in Table 1. A list of the articles included in the sample can be found in the Appendix.

Coding and Content Analysis

The selected newspaper articles are analyzed to answer the research questions. Coding categories were developed based on information in the literature and information gathered from preliminary coding to address the hypothesis about breadth of coverage. The length of the article, the edition in which it was printed, and the location (section and page number) were recorded. The relationship between the perpetrator and victim was assessed. The number of perpetrators and the number of victims in each case were recorded. Some articles included multiple perpetrators (e.g., a gang rape) or multiple victims (e.g., a serial rapist), or described two unrelated incidents in one report. A gang rape was distinguished from a rape committed by a gang member. The term gang rape refers to one in which more than one perpetrator commits rape together. Usually the perpetrators rape only one victim. A rape committed by a gang member involves only one perpetrator who is a member of an all- or mostly-male street gang.

The second hypothesis focused on rape stereotypes and myths. Rape stereotypes suggest that rapes occur late at night, so the time of the incident was recorded. Characteristics of both the victim and the perpetrator were recorded; specifically, gender, age, occupation, and race. Also recorded was if the perpetrator belonged to an all-male group. The circumstances surrounding the crime, such as location (outdoors or indoors, and type of building) alcohol and/or drug use, and use of a weapon were recorded. Also recorded were crimes other than rape that took place at the time of the attack, as well as any previous convictions of the perpetrator.

Table 1: Number of 1998 Rape Articles Sampled by Newspaper

Newspaper	# of Articles
<u>The Atlanta Journal and Constitution</u>	33
<u>The Chicago Tribune</u>	16
<u>The Los Angeles Times</u>	41
<u>The Washington Post</u>	19
Total	109

Coverage

Front page stories are read more frequently than other stories, and also receive higher reported interest from readers (Bogart 1984). The placement of the news report in the paper was recorded as an indicator of importance of the topic. Similarly, interest and readership are higher for longer articles (Bogart 1984). The length of the news story, indicated by the number of words in the article, was recorded.

Relationship

The relationship of the victim to the rapist was recorded. Although most people believe that stranger rape is more prevalent, acquaintance rape is more common. The

Department of Justice indicates that 76% of the women who were raped were assaulted by a current or former husband, cohabiting partner, or date (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998). However, people are less likely to believe that sex between people who know each other is rape. In addition, the higher the perceived level of intimacy between rapist and victim, the more blame the victim receives (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). Thus, the type of relationship (or lack thereof) that existed between the perpetrator and the victim was recorded. Relationship categories include married, formerly married, parent, stepparent, boyfriend or girlfriend, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, strangers, or unknown.

Personal Characteristics

Rape stereotypes suggest victims are young adults, so the ages of the perpetrators and victims were recorded. Age categories are based on those used by Meyers (1997): Child (under 13 years old), Teenager (13 to 19 years old), Adult (20 to 64 years old) and elderly (over 64 years old). Cases of statutory rape and child abuse were coded as the other articles, and can be identified by the age of the victim.

Crime statistics reflect legal definitions which may restrict who may be a victim of or perpetrator of rape, so the gender of both the perpetrator and the victim was recorded. Men are the perpetrators in nearly all rapes (Wilson and Herrnstein 1985; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). If the account did not report the gender of the victims and perpetrators, gender was inferred from the names and pronouns used in news reports. Determining gender was not difficult, as the accounts followed perpetrator names with pronouns, usually “he,” and victims were generally referred to as “a female” or “she.”

Crime statistics are often correlated with the perpetrators' racial or ethnic background. However, these correlations may be inaccurate. Members of some racial groups may be arrested and convicted more often because of discrimination and biases of authorities within the criminal justice system (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). A common stereotype is that most rapists are African-American, and most victims are white. Some researchers indicate that white men use this stereotype to justify violence towards African-American men, and to cause women to fear African-American men (Donat and D'Emilio 1998). Because of this stereotype, African-American may be more likely than men of other racial backgrounds to be arrested or accused of committing a rape. African-American men who are convicted of rape receive the harshest penalties, especially if the victim is white (Donat and D'Emilio 1998). Therefore, indications of race of the perpetrator were recorded. The focus on the rape of white women by African-American men denies that minority women are victims of rape (Wriggins 1998). For balance, the victim's race was also recorded. Race categories include White, African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Other, and Unknown (Brinson 1992).

Allison and Wrightsman (1993) suggest that socioeconomic status is a strong determinant of rape. In general, individuals from lower socioeconomic groups commit more crime than those with a higher status (Sorenson and Siegel 1998). The same pattern is found for perpetrators of rape (Sorenson and Siegel 1998). Occupation was recorded as an indication of socioeconomic status. The category of occupation was divided into four subcategories: employed, unemployed, celebrity, or unknown. More specific subcategories could not be used because of the limited amount of occupational information in the articles.

Names

Whether or not the victim's name is reported is an important issue not directly addressed by the research hypotheses. Many debates have ensued over this topic. Reporters may perceive that the First Amendment gives them the right to publish victims' names, but victims' believe they deserve their privacy protected (Arant 1991). Some victims have successfully sued when their names were released to the press and subsequently published (Arant 1991). Therefore, this study records when and if a victim's name is published, and the circumstances under which this is done (e.g., in a rape/murder case). Two of the sample newspapers, The Washington Post and Los Angeles Times, have policies that do not allow the names of juvenile perpetrators of any crime to be published (Davis 1998; Saugus 1998). The Washington Post does not publish the names of potential rape and sexual assault victims (Smith 1998). The categories of name reporting were perpetrators' or victims' first names, last names, first and last names, or no names. In addition, the reporting of perpetrators' names was recorded to compare frequencies to that of the victims' names.

Location

A common rape stereotype is that most rapes take place outside. Rapes occurring outdoors were recorded. Statistics indicate that the majority of rapes occur inside, most often in the victims' or perpetrators' homes (Johnson and Sigler 1997). Further, the conditions within a bar or fraternity house, such as a large number of intoxicated individuals, low lighting, isolation from external monitoring, approval of violence, and crowding, contribute to violence and sexual coercion (Parks and Miller 1997; Martin and

Hummer 1989). Therefore, the building in which the rape occurred was recorded if it happened inside. The categories for location are outside, in a vehicle, in the victim's home, in the perpetrator's home, indoors (inside a building other than the victim's or perpetrator's home, such as a school, mall, or office building), and unknown.

Alcohol and Drug Use and Abuse

Alcohol use and abuse may be an element in sexual assault. Therefore, whether alcohol or drug use was reported in conjunction with the sexual assault was noted. Any mention of the use of Rohypnol or other "date rape" drugs was recorded. The categories of drug and alcohol use are the perpetrator's use of alcohol, other drugs, or both, and the victim's use of alcohol (forced or voluntary, if known), the victim's forced or voluntary use of other drugs, and the victim's unknowing ingestion of date rape drugs.

Other Crimes

Stereotypes suggest that men who rape are bad. One way in which this image may be communicated is to portray them as criminals. Stranger rapists may commit rape in the process of committing other crimes. These crimes may be committed at the same time as the rape, or committed any time before the rape. The category of other crime, refers to crimes committed at the same time as the rape, include robbery, murder, kidnapping, assault, child molestation, drug use, sodomy, burglary, imprisonment, threats, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, child abuse, and other. What was recorded was whether another crime was reported or not. Also recorded was whether a perpetrator was reported to have a history of committing crimes. These crimes include a

previous rape, robbery, murder, kidnapping, assault, child molestation, drug use, burglary, and threats. For completeness, whether the victim had been raped before, or had any sort of criminal record was recorded.

Portrayal of Victim

Characteristics of victims may shape people's perceptions of them and what happens to them. Qualities such as respectability and amount of resistance to the attack elicit a favorable view of the victim. The victim's behavior prior to the rape may encourage a negative view, especially if she has any prior sexual history, unconventional living arrangements, or was using alcohol or drugs at the time of the attack (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). If an article described any of these characteristics about the victim, they were recorded as present. The victim's physical attractiveness is an inconsistent predictor of blame. Some research indicates that an attractive victim is blamed for stimulating the perpetrator (Meyers 1997). Other researchers indicate that subjects rate an attractive victim more favorably than an unattractive victim, and place less blame on her (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). Any mention of the victim's attractiveness (or unattractiveness) was recorded.

Facilitative Conditions

In addition to these characteristics, certain facilitative conditions are usually statistically associated with the experience of being raped. These conditions are: lateness (the attack occurs between midnight and 6:00 a.m.), speed (the victim is attacked suddenly), power differential (the rapist uses force or the victim is choked), isolation (no

observers are present, the woman lives alone), and access (the woman lives on the first floor) (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). Any mention of these conditions was recorded.

Punishment

Less than two percent of rapists are convicted of their crimes (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). When a rapist is convicted, sentencing is unpredictable and varies widely (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). In addition, preliminary coding research indicates that many news reports of rape are not released until the perpetrator is arrested, begins trial, or is sentenced. Therefore, articles covering arrests or indictments were included in this study. Reporting of a conviction and any punishment the perpetrator receives was recorded (e.g., legal, formal, and informal sanctions). Legal sanctions refer to those imposed by the criminal justice system (e.g., a prison or jail term, or criminal fines). Civil action suits were also included in the category of legal sanctions. Formal sanctions are those imposed by a formal institution other than the criminal justice system (e.g., being fired from work or expelled from school). Informal sanctions are those imposed by individuals in society (e.g., being outcast or shunned, or punished by parents).

The results from coding this information are presented in Chapter IV. The information is presented in tabular form unless an excessive number of categories have no entries.

Reliability Techniques

Various actions were taken to ensure the reliability of the coding. Reliability concerns were reduced through several methods. The first was to use methods that had already been proven reliable by previous research (Babbie 1998). This procedure included replicating a research method used by others and modeling the coding categories on others' conceptualization. The second tactic was to make the variables and coding categories as objective as possible. By reducing subjectivity, the coding itself becomes more reliable. The third approach was to use a retest, in which a research assistant (another Sociology graduate student) read and coded the same articles. The method and coding categories were clearly explained by the researcher. Both researchers coded all of the articles, which resulted in a high level of agreement. A minimal number of disagreements were found. The discrepancy that occurred most often was in the number of words of the article, as the research assistant did not count only the words that referred to a rape in general crime articles. One other disagreement occurred when the researcher coded a police officer's name, thinking it was the perpetrator's name. Discrepancies were discussed and those accounts were recoded.

Accepting or Rejecting Hypotheses

The research hypotheses will be accepted if support is found in the analysis, and rejected if it is absent. The first hypothesis focused on the breadth of coverage of rape. If stranger rapes are predominately reported, the hypothesis will be supported. Official statistics indicate stranger rape occurs less frequently than other types. The number of rapes reported in the six month period in the four metropolitan areas will be compared

with national statistics which are generally perceived to underrepresent the incidence of rape (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). In addition, the length and placement of the article were considered. A shorter article placed inside the newspaper indicates that the newspaper provides limited coverage of rape.

The second hypothesis is that accounts of rape tend to be limited to those that fit rape myths and stereotypes. The articles were content analyzed for perpetuation of rape stereotypes and for any mention of rape myths (described in Chapter II). Articles that contain traditional rape stereotypes and rape myths were considered evidence supportive of the hypothesis. In the analysis the number of articles that report stranger rapes is compared with the number of articles that report date rape. These percentages were then compared to the national average, according to the 1997 FBI Uniform Crime Report and a recent victimization survey conducted by the United States Department of Justice. In addition, the articles were analyzed for what they did not report; i.e., facts or information overlooked, left out, or underreported. Accounts that deviate from traditional stereotypes and myths may indicate that newspapers do not primarily present rapes with expected characteristics.

Summary

Content analysis is an appropriate method for analyzing newspaper accounts of rape. Newspapers from four major United States cities were analyzed. Certain variables were coded, including coverage, relationship, personal characteristics, names, location, alcohol and drug use and abuse, other crimes, portrayal of the victim, facilitative conditions, and legal action. Also, accounts were perused for their support of

stereotypes, rape myths, or victim blame. Findings were analyzed based on the coding, bearing in mind the research questions and hypotheses.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The newspapers' overall treatment of rape was analyzed for content relating to the coding variables. Personal characteristics of rapists and victims are profiled to see if the dominant characteristics parallel those emphasized in stereotypes and myths. In addition, an analysis of whether the articles support stereotypes and rape myths in other ways is included. Accounts that diverged from the other articles were subjected to additional examination, and the nature of the differences pointed out.

General Trends

Length and Placement

The majority of the rape accounts were short, averaging about 246 words. The longest account in the sample was 838 words long, and the shortest was only 38 words long. The Chicago Tribune devoted the shortest average number of words to rape, and The Washington Post averaged the most. Sometimes, reports of rape were included as part of a larger story about crime in general. In these cases, only the number of words that were about the rape were counted (see Table 2).

None of the selected stories made the front page of the newspaper. Most were not even located in the first section (Section A or News) of the newspaper. Although many were found in the second section (Section B), some were found as far back as Section Q or V or in extra neighborhood inserted in the newspapers.

Table 2: Length of Rape Accounts by Newspaper

Paper*	Shortest	Longest	$\bar{X}$
Atlanta	55	624	244
Chicago	50	531	187
Los Angeles	87	838	270
Washington	38	756	283

*Presented by city name

Number of Perpetrators and Victims

The number of perpetrators and victims reported in each rape was recorded and totaled. These numbers are higher than the number of articles because some articles reported multiple offenders (gang rapes) or multiple victims (more than one woman raped by the same man). Some articles were continuations or updates of earlier rapes. These articles were not included in the total numbers; that is, only one account of the same rape was reported. One article, which appeared in The Washington Post, included two unrelated incidents of rape. It was counted as one article, but each incident was coded separately. The total number of perpetrators is 146, and the total number of victims is 157. Some articles reported multiple perpetrators, and some reported multiple victims, which accounts for the discrepancy between the number of articles and the total numbers of victims and perpetrators, as well as for the discrepancy between the number of perpetrators and the number of victims.

Most articles presented a minimal amount of information about the rape and events surrounding it: the date, time, and location of the rape, and the perpetrator's name or description. Although the reports generally provided several items of information about the perpetrator, little was presented about the victim. Usually the victim's gender and age were the only pieces of information reported.

Relationship

The majority (62%) of the 109 rapes reported were stranger rapes. The articles that reported a relationship between the perpetrator and the victim were collapsed into the category of acquaintance rape. Of those articles that did report acquaintance rape (28%), usually the victim and the perpetrator were casual acquaintances – they had just met or were classmates – but some had closer relationships. Two people were raped by their parents' friends, and a male victim was raped by his mother's boyfriend. Four articles reported rape by family members: one girl was repeatedly raped by her cousin, and three children were raped and abused by their parents and three of their uncles. The female bus driver accused of statutory rape of a sixteen-year-old boy had met the boy through her thirteen-year-old daughter, but the article gave no more detail about the relationship. No articles reported a rape by a coworker, spouse, or boyfriend. In 11 (10%) of the articles, the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim could not be determined.

Names

The use of both the victims' and the perpetrators' names was recorded (see Table 3). The name of the victim appeared twice. In one case the victim was murdered after

she was raped. A woman who was abducted but not raped by the same man and witnessed the rape of the woman who was murdered, was not identified. In one article, a man broke into an office building and raped a woman. When one of her coworkers entered the room, the perpetrator shot the coworker. The name of the woman who was shot was published in the article, but the name of the rape victim was not mentioned.

In contrast, the perpetrators' first and last names were used in half of the articles. When no names were given, usually the perpetrators were juveniles or their names were unknown. In one case, the victim had met the perpetrator earlier in the evening, and knew only his first name.

Table 3: Frequency of Use of Perpetrators' and Victims' Names

	Perpetrator	Victim
First	1 (--)	0 (--)
Last	0 (--)	0 (--)
Both	73 (50%)	2 (--)
None	72 (49%)	155 (99%)

Gender

The newspaper articles presented the stereotypical gender distribution, male rapists and female rape victims (see Table 4). The vast majority of the perpetrators (98%) were male, with only 3 (2%) females. Almost all of the victims (99%) were female, with only 2 (1%) males. Of the female perpetrators, one was a twelve-year-old

girl, who participated in a gang rape (the other three participants were male), one was a woman accused of statutory rape of a male, and the other was an accessory to male rapists. Of the male victims, one was a two-year-old boy, assaulted by his mother's boyfriend, and another was a sixteen-year-old victim of statutory rape.

Table 4: Gender of Perpetrator and Victim Reported by Newspaper

Paper*	Perpetrator		Victim	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Atlanta	30 (97%)	1 (3%)	1 (--)	49 (98%)
Chicago	27 (96%)	1 (4%)	0 (--)	26 (100%)
Los Angeles	55 (98%)	1 (2%)	1 (--)	57 (98%)
Washington	31 (100%)	0 (--)	0 (--)	28 (100%)
Total	143 (98%)	3 (2%)	2 (1%)	155 (99%)

*Presented by city name.

Age

The age of the perpetrator was presented for 127 (87%) of the perpetrators (see Table 5). The majority of the perpetrators were adults (N=91). Teenagers formed a distinct minority (N=29). Seven perpetrators (5%) were children, and all of these youth participated in gang rapes (acted with other children to rape someone). Nineteen (13%) of the perpetrator's ages were unknown. No perpetrators were elderly (65 years old or older). Age was presented for 80 (51%) of the victims (see Table 6). Over half of those

for whom ages were given were teenagers (N=43). Almost equal numbers were children (N=17) and adults (N=19), and one was elderly.

Table 5: Perpetrators' Ages Reported by Newspaper

Paper*	Perpetrators' Age Category				
	Child	Teenager	Adult	Elderly	Unknown
Atlanta	4 (13%)	5 (16%)	17 (55%)	0 (--)	5 (16%)
Chicago	3 (11%)	13 (46%)	9 (32%)	0 (--)	3 (11%)
Los Angeles	0 (--)	4 (13%)	44 (79%)	0 (--)	8 (14%)
Washington	0 (--)	7 (23%)	21 (68%)	0 (--)	3 (9%)
Total	7 (5%)	29 (20%)	91 (62 %)	0 (--)	19 (13%)

*Presented by city name

Table 6: Victims' Age Category by Newspaper

Paper*	Victims' Age Category				
	Child	Teenager	Adult	Elderly	Unknown
Atlanta	9 (18%)	6 (12%)	2 (4%)	0 (--)	33 (66%)
Chicago	3 (12%)	14 (54%)	4 (15%)	0 (--)	5 (19%)
Los Angeles	2 (4%)	15 (27%)	7 (12%)	0 (--)	34 (59%)
Washington	3 (13%)	8 (35%)	6 (26%)	1 (4%)	5 (22%)
Total	17 (11%)	43 (27%)	19 (12%)	1 (--)	77 (49%)

*Presented by city name

Race

The newspapers did not report the perpetrators' race the majority of the time (see Table 7). Of the 146 perpetrators, 17 (80%) were not identified by race. Four of the perpetrators were white, five of the perpetrators were African-American, and 20 of the perpetrators were Hispanic. The race of the perpetrator was presented almost entirely by the Los Angeles Times. In this newspaper, the race of the perpetrator was presented for 28 (50%) of the 56 perpetrators. One reporter for the newspaper mentioned that the perpetrator's race was not given because he was wearing a mask, and the victim was unable to clearly identify his race. The Washington Post reported the perpetrator's race

Table 7: Perpetrators' Race by Newspaper

Paper*	Perpetrators' Race					
	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Other	Unknown
Atlanta	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	31 (100%)
Chicago	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	28 (100%)
Los Angeles	3 (5%)	5 (9%)	20 (36%)	0 (--)	0 (--)	28 (50%)
Washington	1 (3%)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	30 (97%)
Total	4 (3%)	5 (3%)	20 (12%)	0 (--)	0 (--)	117 (80%)

*Presented by city name

once (the perpetrator was a white man), and both The Atlanta Journal and Constitution and the Chicago Tribune elected not to mention the perpetrator's race at any time. The race of the victim was never reported.

Occupation

The occupation of the perpetrator or of the victim was rarely reported. The most common exceptions were when the perpetrator and victim were students (14 perpetrators and 18 victims accounts were reported as either high school or college students). A few victims (four) were raped while at work, and occupation was apparent. For example, two female store employees were assaulted while working at retail stores, one woman was raped in her office while at work, and one woman, who was a social worker, was raped by a fourteen-year-old boy whom she was transporting.

One article covered a rape in which the perpetrator was a celebrity. A woman filed a civil suit against Oscar De La Hoya, a professional welterweight champion boxer. The article, which appeared in the Los Angeles Times, was 388 words long -- 118 more words were devoted to this case than the average Times article, and 105 more words than the overall average. Only one article covered this case, but this may be because it was printed on November 26, 1998, and any following developments (e.g., coverage of the trial) would not have occurred within the sampling frame.

Substances

Substance use was very infrequently mentioned. Three articles reported the victim or perpetrator using alcohol. In one case, the rapist gave an eleven-year-old girl

fruit punch which had liquor in it, and was drunk himself at the time of the attack. In another, mentioned above, the female bus driver accused of statutory rape provided alcohol to the sixteen-year-old victim. The third case was of three teenage girls, who reported that the boys who raped them had forced them to drink alcohol. One article mentioned earlier suggested drug use by a third party rape facilitator. In this situation, the victim's mother was addicted to crack, and allowed a man to sexually abuse her daughter. An article reported that a perpetrator had a previous drug conviction, although he was apparently not using drugs at the time of the rape.

Location

Most of the articles (84%, N=107) disclosed the location of the rape. Of those locations reported, the majority (50%) were indoors, in a building other than the victims' or perpetrators' homes. Examples of these locations included schools, office buildings, retail shops, and residences other than the victims' or perpetrators'. Twenty-two rapes occurred in the victims' homes, and six took place in the perpetrators' homes. Twelve (11%) rapes took place outside. One of these outside rapes fit the stereotypical rape scenario: a woman was out jogging when a man attacked her, pulled her into a ravine, and raped her. Thirteen rapes (11%) took place in a vehicle. Twenty (17%) of the rapes took place in an unknown location. The total number of locations is higher than the total number articles due to articles that reported more than one account of rape (e.g., one perpetrator raped three different women, and the three locations were reported in the account).

All-Male Peer Groups

Two of the articles reported that the perpetrator was a member of an all male group. One perpetrator was part of an all-male street gang. The other was an athlete, a member of his high school football team. Both of these perpetrators were teenagers. Neither of the accounts indicated that the rape was related to group activities or membership.

Other Crimes

Some of the accounts (20%, N=27) included the perpetrator's previous criminal record in the report. Many of the articles reported any previous arrests and/or convictions of the perpetrator, ranging from violent crimes, such as murder, robbery, or other rapes, to property crimes, and also included previous child abuse or sexual molestation in which they were the perpetrators.

In addition to the perpetrator's previous criminal record, other crimes committed at the time of the rape were presented; 43% (N=46) of the accounts reported this. These other crimes included robbery, kidnapping or assault most frequently, but also encompassed child abuse, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, drug charges, burglary, sodomy, false imprisonment, and aggravated assault. Frequently, perpetrators would steal the victim's money or car keys, or take something from the victim's house; robbery composed 40% of the 150 crimes other than rape. False imprisonment, kidnapping, and abduction were also associated with rape. The rapes were presented as the central crime, and the other crimes by-products of the rape. The exception was the case in which the rape victim was also murdered; this account focused on the murder.

Punishment

Few of the articles reported any type of punishment for the perpetrator. In part, this reflected the stage of the legal process (recent arrest) and the limited likelihood that rape trials were reported in these newspapers. When reported, punishment took the form of legal punishment, such as a prison sentence. Three articles mentioned formal sanctions. One reported that a perpetrator was suspended and probably going to be fired from his job on the police force. The female bus driver was suspended from her job with pay. An article stated that a teenage perpetrator was denied admission to a university, and although university representatives would not comment on their decision, the report speculated that it was related to his pending rape trial. Another case involving a student mentioned that the school did not punish a male student for raping a classmate in school. No articles reported any informal sanctions.

Facilitative Conditions

Allsion and Wrightsman (1993) discuss facilitative conditions which are statistically associated with rape (see Chapter III). The first condition concerns the time of the attack. Not all articles reported the time of the rape. The reporters pointed out rapes that occurred outside of the lateness time frame (between midnight and 6:00 a.m.). These were situations in which a woman was raped "in broad daylight" or "in the middle of the day, with everyone around." Forty-two of the articles reported the time of the attack; 31 (74%) of those did not occur between midnight and 6:00 a.m.

Another facilitative condition is a power differential between the perpetrator and the victim. Most articles indicated or implied this condition. For example, one article

described a woman who was beaten up by the perpetrator, forced into the back seat of her car, and then raped. In addition, rapes in which the perpetrator was much older than the victim (e.g., an adult perpetrator and a child victim) imply a power differential. In an account of an attempted rape, an eleven-year-old girl was attacked by an adult male while she was asleep. Also, reporters pointed out the use or presence of a weapon. Thirty (28%) of the articles reported some type of weapon use or possession.

The facilitative conditions of isolation and access were reported infrequently. Three articles mentioned that the woman lived alone or was at home by herself when the attack occurred. Five articles, including the three previously mentioned, reported that the perpetrator entered through an unlocked door or window. The location of the woman's home or apartment was not reported.

Stereotypes, Rape Myths, and Blaming the Victim

The majority of the articles (64%) supported the stereotype that a typical rape is a violent predatory rape. Few reports presented an acquaintance rape. Several reports presented information which supported common rape stereotypes: a suspect who targeted a woman living alone and entered through an unlocked door, a rapist who was a convicted felon, or a victim who was jogging down a sparsely populated stretch of road and pulled down a ravine and raped. One writer's presentation of the perpetrator countered the stereotype that all rapists are "bad" men. This account included statements from the perpetrator's neighbors, who expressed disbelief that someone who was "nice" and "normal" could have committed rape. Although the article does indicate that people were shocked at the charge, the idea that not all rapists are habitual criminals is presented.

Most of the articles reviewed did not directly support any rape myths. One article that appeared in The Atlanta Journal and Constitution gave a positive detailed physical description of the victim. This may fit with the myth that rape victims are beautiful women who invite rape because of their attractiveness. The same article mentioned that the perpetrator reportedly had a girlfriend, and someone asked why he “needed” to rape women. The perpetrator, a serial rapist, replied that he enjoyed rape because it was “forbidden” and “exciting.” The statements included in this article are consistent with the myth that rape is a sex crime, committed by men who are not sexually satisfied in a relationship, rather than a violent crime.

Other accounts that may have supported rape myths were those in which a man had attempted rape, but the victim had managed to escape harm. Four articles in the sample described how victims had escaped a potential rapist. Some women were able to elude the perpetrator on their own, by hitting, biting, kicking, using pepper spray, or simply running. One eleven-year-old girl, who was attacked by a family friend in a hotel room, kicked the man in the groin, locked herself in the bathroom, and then ran to the front desk, where the desk clerk hid her and called the police. Others avoided rape when another person, such as a passerby or police officer, scared off the rapist. These attempted rapes counter the stereotype, as the potential victims were all able to escape, and did not succumb to the perpetrator's uncontrollable passion. They also contradict the myth that all women secretly want to be raped.

Several articles presented information which seemed to try to shift at least some blame to the victim. Various reporters mentioned that women were alone in their homes with doors or windows unlocked, that they were walking or jogging alone, or that they

did not resist the perpetrator. For example, The Washington Post reported a female college student who was raped leaving a fraternity party and walking alone down a *dark* street (emphasis added). Some of these accounts also included rape myths. An Atlanta Journal and Constitution article reported that the perpetrator's defense lawyer stated that the victim's claim was "baseless" because she never resisted, said no, or told the man to stop. However, the article did mention that the perpetrator had already beaten her up and had a gun.

Some articles reported information that appeared to trivialize an incident or discount the victims. For example, in one case three teenage girls accused four older teenage boys of giving them alcohol and then raping them. The article noted that the girls' classmates, who were present at the trial, "jeered and made derogatory comments about the girls under their breath" (Tribune News Services 1998: 7). The article also quoted the defense lawyer, who stated that he did not think the girls had "a grip on what was done to them" (Tribune News Services 1998: 7).

A set of rapes stood out as different from the others. These were ones that did not fit rape stereotypes because of the victims' age, the characteristics of the perpetrator, or because they were about a serial rapist. For example, counter to rape stereotypes, a few perpetrators in the study were female. Two articles in The Atlanta Journal and Constitution focused on a female bus driver who was charged with statutory rape of a sixteen-year-old boy. Parents were reportedly outraged because the school did not fire her; however, the writer indicated that the victim was not a student who rode her bus, but rather a boy she met through her daughter.

Other rapes that were different were those that dealt with children as the victims.

A Washington Post rape that stood out was one in which a man paid a woman to sexually abuse her six-year-old daughter. The girl's mother, who was a prostitute and addicted to crack, was also indicted on charges. The man paid the girl's mother \$20 to \$100 to abuse her daughter sexually, and molested the girl an estimated twelve times. The mother witnessed some of the incidents, and allegedly instructed her daughter how to perform oral sex.

An article in the Los Angeles Times dealt with continued child abuse. In this case, a two-year-old boy was abused, raped, and eventually murdered by his mother's boyfriend. Another case that was remarkable involved a six-year-old victim of a gang rape. Not only is that in itself unique, but other events surrounding the attack were peculiar. For example, the girl was gang raped by four other children several times over the course of three months. The oldest of the perpetrators was fourteen years old. In addition, one of the perpetrators was another female, who did not just look on as the rapes occurred but joined in the sexual assault.

Only one newspaper (The Atlanta Journal and Constitution) covered a serial rapist during the study months. The rapist, John Scieszka, had raped as many as eight women over the course of two years. Although the articles focused on the rape trial, each article included the original incidents, which fit the rape stereotype. Scieszka had served a prior prison term for rape. The reporter mentioned that he lived in a nice, middle class neighborhood, and his neighbors described him as a nice, "normal" person. This description is contrary to the stereotype of a rapist, for people who knew him expressed shock that such a person was capable of committing rape. One Los Angeles Times

account reported a reward being offered for a suspected serial rapist. However, no other stories about this man were found.

Summary

A sample of 109 rape accounts were content analyzed. The analysis indicated that accounts of rape present a minimal amount of information, especially about the victim. Most of the victims were female, and most of the perpetrators were male, reflecting common trends. Race was rarely reported. The majority of the accounts covered stranger rape, which reflects the common stereotype. Few of the accounts used rape myths or seemed to shift the blame to the victim. Some accounts stood out as unusual, and the aspects that made them unusual are highlighted. A discussion of these findings presents a deeper understanding of the trends and patterns recorded in the newspaper accounts.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Violence against women should be treated as a serious problem. The FBI Uniform Crime Report (UCR) shows that 96,122 rapes were cleared by arrest in 1997 (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1999). The UCR only records those crimes cleared by arrest. Rapes which are not reported to the police, or those for which no arrest is made are not included in the total. Victimization studies indicate that more rapes occur than are ever reported to the police. Every year in the United States, about 876,000 rapes are perpetrated against women (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998). Official statistics and victimization surveys indicate that violence against women is usually committed by an acquaintance. Just over three quarters of women raped since the age of eighteen were victimized by a current or former husband, cohabiting partner, date, or boyfriend (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998).

The findings of this study supported the hypothesis that newspaper accounts of rape do not reflect the frequency with which rape occurs in our society. For six separate months, only 157 women were reported to have been raped in four major metropolitan newspapers' coverage areas. The national statistics suggest much higher numbers of rape would have occurred in these population centers. The UCR presents data on the rate of rape frequency, related to size of city. However, the way these data are presented does not allow for a comparison between the number of rapes cleared by arrest and the number of rapes covered by the cities' newspapers.

An indication of limited coverage is the length of the articles that cover rape.

Most of the articles were short, averaging only 246 words per article, and some were part of an article about crime in general, and none appeared on the first page of the newspaper or any section of the newspaper. For example, occasionally a crime report, listing every crime reported to the police on a certain day, included a rape. Few rapes were the subject of follow-up articles.. Rape stories were not prominently featured. No rape story appeared on a front page, and rarely was an article placed in the first section of the paper. Newspaper readers receive limited or no information about many rapes

The second hypothesis is that newspaper accounts of rape primarily present rapes which have the characteristics depicted in rape stereotypes and myths. The research provides some support for this hypothesis. Sixty-four percent of the articles covered stranger rapes. This rate is in contrast to the estimated incidence of stranger rape, which ranges from 15% to 24% (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998; Allison and Wrightsman 1993). The stereotypical rape victim is young. The reported ages of the victims are consistent with Bureau of Justice statistics. The highest rate of victimization for females is in the 16 to 19-year-old age group (Koss 1998). Although the largest classification of age in this study is "Unknown", most of the victims whose ages were reported were teenagers (13 to 19 years old). The Bureau of Justice statistics indicate that most perpetrators arrested for rape are under 25 years old. The UCR shows that 17% were under 18 years old, and 83% were over 18 (Koss 1998; Federal Bureau of Investigation 1999). Consistent with the UCR, this study found that 62% of perpetrators were "Adults" (20 to 64 years old).

Many articles portrayed the perpetrator as a "bad" person, by citing prior criminal records, listing other crimes that occurred at the time of the attack, or recording

unflattering statements about the perpetrator's personality, and included people's expressions of disbelief when someone "nice" or "normal" committed rape. Accounts of attempted rape may support rape myths, because they suggest that, if she resists enough, a victim may be able to escape a potential rapist. A second pattern of presenting rape with characteristics that deviated from or contradicted stereotypes was also encountered. The reports of female perpetrators and male victims, although few, are examples of this pattern. Other examples include the gang rape committed by children, children as victims of rape, and the serial rapist. The latter examples may be indicative of what those who present the news perceive to be particularly serious forms of rape.

Rape myths generally support blaming the victim. The newspaper articles did not disclose much information about the rape victims, and thus did not blame the victims. Although a general rule in news reporting is to protect the victim from further harm by not releasing her name, very little in the way of description was included about the victims. Apparently, campaigns to protect rape victims from secondary victimization have influenced newspaper reporting. The victim's gender was reported in every article, but in many articles, that was the only identifying characteristic of the victim. The victim's age was the next most frequently reported characteristic, although 49% of the articles did not reveal that information. The majority of the victims were female, and almost all of the perpetrators were male. This finding was consistent with both the Department of Justice survey as well as the UCR, which reveal the same general pattern. For the FBI, all rape victims, by definition, are female; "forcible rape is the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will" (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1999).

Race is not a component of rape myths, although historically strong reactions have followed reports of black males raping white females. Few of the articles reported the race of the perpetrator. The UCR reports that in 1997, 58.2% of those arrested for rape were white, 39.7% were African-American, 1.1% were American Indian or Alaskan native, and 1% were Asian or Pacific Islander (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1999). The race of the perpetrator was not reported in 80% of the accounts, because with one exception only the Los Angeles Times mentioned race. The most frequently identified perpetrators in the Los Angeles area were Hispanic, a category not included in the UCR statistics. Physical descriptions were frequently given of the rapist, even if he was not at large.

Perceptions of risk of victimization may not reflect the risk of rape by race, but the newspaper accounts do not address the racial disparity in official statistics. The Department of Justice survey data indicated that the incidence of rape is highest among American Indian and Alaska Native women, and lowest among Asian or Pacific Islander women (Tjaden and Theonnes 1998). The race of the victims was never reported; therefore, a comparison between victimization rates and newspaper presentation cannot be made. Only one article described any of the victim's physical characteristics.

The perpetrator's occupation was occasionally casually mentioned. For example, the account of the civil suit against Oscar De La Hoya pointed out that he was a professional boxer. The victim's occupation was only reported when it was part of the rape story, related to when and where the rape occurred. For instance, several women were raped while at work.

The consequence of limited information about rape victims appearing in news accounts may be that the rape victim does not seem real to the reader because of the efforts to prevent her identification. Readers may even fill in the missing information assuming that victims have the characteristics emphasized in stereotypes and myths. The perpetrators may appear more real or human because they are described in more detail. This style of reporting may be one reason that people continue to blame the victim in rape cases. If the media continue to make victims anonymous, yet describe more details about the perpetrators, people may believe they “know” the perpetrators, and therefore have more sympathy for them, or at least little basis for empathizing with their victims. In addition, the anonymity of the victims provides a blank for the reader to fill. Leaving out information about the victim is a way the media may allow myths and stereotypes to remain unchallenged.

Representation of rape varied by newspaper. As noted above, with the exception of one article in The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times was the only newspaper to report the race of the perpetrator. All of the cities in which the four newspapers are published are racially diverse, yet three elected not to describe the perpetrators’ race. Caution in reporting race may be associated with two things. One is the general concern that, in the past, the race of criminal suspects was only mentioned if the suspect was non-white. The second is not supporting societal fears about cross race rape (African-American perpetrators, white victims); people may believe that this type of rape is more common, and if the media reinforce this belief, prejudice may increase.

Another characteristic that stood out about the Los Angeles Times was the number and length of rape articles. This paper had largest number of articles, as well as

the longest article, and the second longest average number of words. This discrepancy cannot be explained away by city size differences, nor presumably a higher incidence of rape in Los Angeles than in the other cities. One interpretation might be that this newspaper was more aware of the need to report rape than the other papers. However, since the newspaper also had the highest proportion of reported stranger rapes, it simply might be more likely to treat certain types of crimes as newsworthy.

Contributions

Rape prevention strategies usually focus on four common goals. The first of these goals is to deter attempted rapes by educating potential victims. Those who are most vulnerable to victimization can take preventative measures to avoid being raped. Second, providing the appropriate responses can decrease victims' trauma. These responses are compassion and support, rather than blame and hostility. A third goal is to prevent recurrence by incarceration and treatment. Although the majority of rapists are not convicted of their crimes, this low rate could be changed through increasing awareness both among the general public and within the judicial system. Finally, the incidence of rape could be decreased by changing the gender values and rape myths of society (Allison and Wrightsman 1993). Altering the way news reports characterize rape and its victims could change these.

The media have the potential to play a role in reducing the risk of rape by presenting accurate information about rape. That is, by warning women about situations in which they may be at risk of rape, so women may protect themselves by avoiding those types of circumstances. An interesting aspect of The Atlanta Journal and

Constitution was the style of reporting and the headlines used. Headlines in this paper were very straightforward, leaving no questions about what the article covered, and the articles were very factual, short but to the point. This model of reporting may benefit women because the headlines provide information about the rape. Someone may read just the headline and still gain a bit more knowledge about a circumstance under which a rape occurred. Generally, this research suggests that although the media do not currently do so, they could promote greater awareness and thus reduce the incidence of rape.

Feminist theory asserts that rape is the result of social traditions in which males are dominant and females are exploited and treated in subservient and degrading ways (Ellis 1989). Although rape has existed throughout history, the function of rape has not changed. Rape is an assertion of power and dominance, employed by males to limit females' power and freedom. Even though women have become increasingly equal to men in political, professional, and social realms, the threat of rape continues to place women in an inferior position (Ellis 1989). Misrepresentations, through the perpetuation of false stereotypes and myths, and underreporting may serve to reinforce male dominance (Meyers 1997). If the general public does not understand the conditions under which most rapes occur, and that rape is more common than news reports indicate, people may continue to condone rape through inaction and blame the victim rather than the perpetrator. A change in media reporting of rape may stimulate changes in beliefs and behavior, and bring about greater understanding of rape and compassion for its victims. If awareness of rape is increased, the remaining manifestation of gender inequality may be challenged.

Limitations

This research has several limitations. The first is the limited time period used for the newspapers analyzed. Due to the large number of headlines generated by the keyword search, only articles published in 1998 were considered for the sample. Ideally, different years would have been sampled to see if there were trends over time in reporting. A more extended time period might have helped identify the impact of various feminist efforts to change the treatment of rape victims. In addition, a longer time period might have yielded some other types of rape accounts. For example, a preliminary review of June 1998 articles included two cases involving date rape drugs. In one of these articles, the perpetrators were a set of twins against whom twelve women had filed a lawsuit. The six month sample analyzed did not contain any stories of date rape drug use.

Another limitation is the inclusion of only four cities' newspapers. Although the papers were chosen to target different geographic locations, a more complete analysis could be conducted by using papers from ten or more cities. One of the newspapers' accounts varied in several ways from the others. Having more papers in a sample would aid interpretation of these differences. In addition, newspapers from smaller cities could have been included. Since rape reports appeared in local or neighborhood sections, items may have been more predominant and emphasized more by a smaller city's paper. Also, large metropolitan newspapers cover areas where other serious crimes - particularly murder - occur with enough frequency to draw attention.

A third limitation is the subjective nature of the coding. Although several reliability measures were employed, such as distinct categories and a secondary coding, subjectivity is still an issue.

A fourth limitation was the use of the Lexis-Nexis database to locate and collect articles. This method has advantages, such as ease and accuracy of finding articles. Also, the entire articles was available in the database, which reduced the amount of time spent searching for articles and eliminated the problem of missing issues of newspapers. And, reading the articles on a computer screen produced less eyestrain than microfiche, and a hard copy of the articles could be easily printed. However, this method also had some disadvantages. One disadvantage was that any photographs or graphics printed in the original newspaper articles were not available. An article may not include the perpetrator's race in the text, but a photograph of the perpetrator would allow people to discern that information. In addition, the exact location of the article was not available. The page number and edition were indicated, but the position on the page (top, bottom, right, left) and the placement in relation to other articles could not be discerned. Finally, the size of the headline was not available on the database. A larger headline is more eye-catching, and therefore may stimulate more people to read the article. Overall, though, I would recommend the use of this database to identify and gather articles.

Suggestions for Future Research

One suggestion for further study would be to enlarge the sample size. Choosing articles from different years (to study trends over time), from more cities, and from different sizes of cities (to compare and contrast reporting behaviors) are ways to increase

the scope of the study. Another suggestion is to focus on different media than newspapers, such as magazines or television news reports. Then, reporting could be compared across different types of media. The details reported in newspaper reports could be compared to those included in the evening television news.

Another suggestion is to focus on particular rape cases, seeing what kind of coverage they receive over time. An example would be to follow the reporting of serial rapists. The initial reports of the rapes, the search for the perpetrator, the arrest, and the judicial process could all be analyzed to see how coverage changes over time. Or, different variables may be analyzed. For example, whether or not the article included a photograph, and what that photograph depicted, could be analyzed.

Although a content analysis is an appropriate method for studying media representation of rape, other methods may produce different results. For example, focus groups may provide more in-depth information. A group could be asked directly their opinion of newspapers and how accurate the information in them is, and compared with their perceptions of rape. Discussions could cover both the media's influence and people's use of stereotypes and rape myths. Or, participants could be presented with stories and asked about their perceptions of rapists and their victims. This would indicate the influence of the media on people's perceptions.

A final suggestion is to analyze Internet sites for their content. Electronic media are gaining popularity. Many newspapers have web sites on which their entire archives may be accessed. In addition, doing research for this study revealed that many Internet sites exist that are devoted to rape. These sites could be studied to discover variations in content. The use of stereotypes and myths or challenges to them could be explored. Web

sites include news, facts or statistics about rape; suggestions for avoiding rape and self-defense tips; information about date rape drugs; and on-line support groups for rape victims and their families. An analysis of some of these sites would produce an interesting, contemporary study. The viewpoint of the sites may reflect more closely the general public's attitudes toward rape. Internet pages are less likely to be influenced by public demands or organizational regulations. Websites would include information that newspaper reports do not, such as the victims' point of view or descriptions of rape not reported to the police.

Conclusions

This study revealed that major newspapers report stranger rape more often than acquaintance rape, despite statistics that indicate that acquaintance rape is more prevalent. Although newspapers presented personal information about perpetrators, including first and last names, ages, and physical characteristics, little information about the victims was made available. The majority of articles in the sample did not communicate rape myths or blame the victim. Perhaps this is largely due to their failure to provide much information about rape victims at all. Many articles did perpetuate stereotypes about rape, reporting stranger rape more often than acquaintance rape. Describing particularly unusual cases of rape may also perpetuate stereotypes. For example, the accounts of the serial rapist may reinforce the belief that only "bad" men commit rape, and supports the stereotype that stranger rapes are common. People's perceptions of the world may be shaped by information they receive from the media. Establishing whether the media reflect or shape what we perceive about rape is difficult,

in part because beliefs about rape are intertwined with basic beliefs about gender in our society. Newspapers report certain types of rapes because of audience demands or the accounts may influence the public's attitudes; the relationship is unclear. Further research could address this question by using additional research strategies, such as employing focus groups.

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