A critical discourse analysis on the social construction rape through the media

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ABSTRACT

Current research has shown that the mass media informs and shapes individuals perceptions of issues in society. In cases where the media reports rape it can consequently lead to victim blaming or precipitation as news often reinforces rape myths through its content and discourse. This investigation aims to research how news reporting contributes to the social construction of rape through their choices of discourse. A critical discourse analysis was conducted on a variety of UK on-line news sources dated between 2016-2018. During the analysis three themes were more prominent than the rest: drunk and asking for it, guilty until proven innocent and he is not the type to rape. All three themes illustrate victim-blaming tendencies and can lead to even narrower definitions of rape than the one expressed by the law, leaving readers with stereotypical perceptions of rape and a tendency to discount anything that does not fit that rape situation. This can lead to the non-reporting of rapes as well as lower conviction rates in court. Further research could look at the discourse used prior to and after a verdict has been reached in rape cases.

KEY WORDS:	RAPE	MEDIA	DISCOURSE	RAPE MYTHS	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Introduction:

Rape is becoming a serious problem in contemporary society, statistics show that in 2016-17 41,150 rape accusations were made in Wales and England. However, only 5,190 went to court and 2,991 ended in conviction (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2018). One of the reasons for low conviction rates is the debate over perceived consent. The sexual offence act (2003) defines rape as "if person (A) commits an offence if; he intentionally penetrates the vagina, mouth or anus of another person (B) with his penis, person B has not consented, and A does not reasonably believe that B consented". Consent describes a state of mind and someone can consent without explicitly saying so. Guilt therefore depends on what the perpetrator believes about a woman's state of mind regardless of her actual intention and an interpretation of the victim's behaviour as having led to a reasonable belief that she consented (Larcombe et al, 2016). These inferences are drawn based on society's beliefs about how individual's act or should act in certain situations (Tiersma,2008). Although the legal definition of rape has changed over time Garvey (2005) maintains that modern laws are like old ones, He argues that although rape is illegal, victims are treated like criminals. The modern legal systems seem to put the victim on trial as well as the perpetrator, consequently leaving women powerless. Brison (2002) states that although males can be the victim of rape, Women are more likely to be victimised than men, therefore rape is usually seen as a gendered crime. Approximately 12,000 males are victims of rape compared to 85,000 women in England and wales each year (Office National statistics, 2017). Therefore, this investigation looks at the discourse used when the media reports cases of rape where women are the victims and men are the perpetrators.

Feminists such as Brownmiller (1975) posit that rape is a social practice and a key function is to keep women powerless. She suggests men do not rape due to impulsive sexual urges but to maintain control. By undermining the female and male relationship rape consequently maintains fear in women and power in men (Watson et al, 2012). Rape myths and scripts can reinforce this power imbalance. Rape myths are a complex set of beliefs that are generally false about rape and encourage sexual aggression from men and violence against women (Buckward et al,2005). Williams (2007) argues that women are socialised to take social and moral responsibility for controlling innately aggressive behaviour from men, by restricting their behaviour and acting in an appropriate feminine manner. Payne et al (1999) found 7 types of female rape myths: that the woman was asking for it, it was not really rape, he did not mean to rape her, she wanted it, she is a liar, rape is a trivial event and rape is a deviant event. Rape scripts are beliefs about stereotypical incidents of rape (Peterson and Muehlenhard,2004), such as the assumption that rape is a surprise and aggressive attack by a stranger against a non-intoxicated and non-promiscuous woman in a deserted place (Razak, 1994; Maier,2008). Rape myths and scripts, which narrow down the definition of rape reflected by the law and increase victim precipitation tendencies (Hockett et al,2016) develop for a variety of reasons; to avoid acknowledging rape within a social group (Giacopassi & Dull, 1986), to protect a belief that unfair things don't happen to good people (Lerner,1980), to maintain social status of a gendered hierarchy (Hockett et al, 2009), to avoid the reality of rape (Burt, 1991) and through representations of rape reported in the media (Franiuk et al, 2008a).

The mass media is a central component of an individual's everyday life (Livingstone and Bovilles,2011) and plays a primary role in informing and shaping public perception of diverse issues in society (Hodgetts and Chamberlain, 2007). It does not just facilitate understanding and support but can also endorse ignorance and discrimination (Schneider et al,2010). How the media reports rape can be harmful for victims and public perceptions. Bohner (2001) found participants displayed victim blaming tendencies when asked to create headlines based on a video of sexual assault. This would suggest that how the media reports rape may not only reinforce acceptance of rape myths for those who already accepted them but can influence individuals who previously did not. Media reporting commonly takes the form of victim precipitation. O'Hara (2012) found when analysing newspapers that women were commonly blamed for their rape due to their behaviour such as how they chose to dress or how much they drank. The media often over emphasises how much the women drank in cases of rape. They stereotypically represent drunk women as promiscuous (George et al, 1983) leaving the impression that women who engage in binge-drinking activities are the type of women to engage in unsafe sex (Piombo and Piles,1996). This is problematic as it suggests female binge-drinking is a cause of rape rather than male sexual violence, perpetuating the belief that women are to be blamed (Meyer,2010; Finch and Munro, 2007). The media also tends to ignore how much the perpetrator drank, but in cases where it is mentioned, alcohol is used as an excuse for the perpetrator's behaviour and therefore reduces their responsibility for the assault (Abrahams et al,2006).

The media also reinforces rape myths by over-reporting false allegation stories, strengthening the belief that women tend to lie about being raped (Gavey and Glow, 2001). Lee-Koo (2002) found 20% of articles in his study were based on false allegations and the idea was spread even more widely across all articles. However, research has found only 2-10% of rape allegations are false (Lonsway et al, 2009; Lisak et al, 2010; Heenan and Murray,2006), the same percentage for every other crime (Tuerkheimer, 2017). Franiuk et al (2008b) found participants who read news articles endorsing rape myths on the Kobe Bryant case were less likely to think Bryant was guilty and the victim was lying, than the participants who read news articles challenging rape myths. More than 65% of the news articles on Bryant endorsed at least one rape myth and 45% made a positive comment about him, but only 5.1% made a positive comment about the victim. Such reporting can reinforce an individual's underlying bias that the perpetrator has an honest character while the victim is a liar. Knight et al (2001) states that perceptions of rape are influenced by the celebrity status of the perpetrator; a celebrity is given the benefit of the doubt; the women are often deemed to be looking for media attention and lying to get it.

Cuklanz (1996) found the news discusses multiple elements of rape outside of context, thus perpetuating traditional and stereotypical views of rape. This was supported by Los and Chamard (1997) who found stranger rape was reported the most over a 5-year period and although acquaintance rape received the most attention it usually concentrated on the victim's reputation. In 73% of reported rapes, the perpetrator is known to the victim, but 86% of the media reports describe an attack by a stranger in a public place (Kelly et al, 2005: Black et al, 2011). They also found there was a clear emphasis on reports about stereotypical rape cases, unusual cases and the cases where the accusation had been falsified. Such stereotypical reporting can narrow down a victim's definition of rape. If their experience strongly contradicts "the real rape script" they may therefore be

prevented from applying the definition of rape to non-consensual sex and acknowledging they have been raped and so fail to report it (Peterson and Muehlenhard,2004). The constant reporting of stereotypical rapes also negatively influences the general public's opinion. Krahé et al (2007) found individuals perceive 'real' rape situations as those where the perpetrator is a stranger threatening physical force if the victim does not comply. This reinforces victim-blaming tendencies if victims do not fight back. As well as reinforcing rape myths the media often describes perpetrators as 'beasts' or 'monsters' to distance the relationship between them and ordinary men (Mason and Monckton-Smith, 2008). It reinforces the impression that these men are deviants in a normal culture and fail to recognise that they could be seen as ordinary men socialised by a deviant culture (Dworkin, 1976). However, Bonnes (2013) has found that in news reports the perpetrator is often humanised by making positive comments about their personality, placing blame on external factors such as how much the victim drank or over-emphasising that the victim and the perpetrator were good friends. Thus, drawing attention away from the rape. Through the use and exclusion of certain words and by separating the perpetrator from their crime, news reports often de-emphasise the perpetrators role in the rape (Worthington,2008).

The media's representation of rape has had a major impact on society. Aslitz (2011) states the media's construction of rape affects the criminal justice system, legal decisions and jury attitudes towards rape. Edward et al (2011) found that the media plays an important role in promoting rape myths as they help structure sexual scripts. Malamuth and Check (1985) found juries' beliefs in rape myths benefited the perpetrator and led to a decrease in conviction rates. Participants who were exposed to rape myth endorsing articles prior to a trial were more likely to side with the defendant in rape cases (Levenson and D'Amora,2007).

Although research has concentrated on the media and how it can reinforce rape myths and stereotypical rape situations, it has focused on the content rather than the language used when talking about the victim and perpetrator. A search of the Manchester Metropolitan library database found little research investigating the media's discourse and how it influenced an individual's application of the legal definition of rape to a specific situation. Looking at the language media uses when talking about rape can identify why individuals hold views about stereotypical situations of rape and how their language may be reinforcing rape myths. It can also help identify words that may be perceived as biased in support of the perpetrator or the victim. Identifying words that may influence opinions offers the insight that discourse is never neutral, and can help encourage the reporting of cases in a way that is less slanted in the ways of those who already hold the power - typically the men.

The study aims to identify what discourse news articles use to socially construct rape and whether the news is constructed in a way that displays rape myth acceptance. A move to more objective reporting could potentially lead to more victims of rape feeling secure enough to come forward and higher convictions rates in court.

Methodology:

Design:

This investigation used a qualitative analysis to investigate how news reporting contributes to the social construction of rape. Bonnes' (2013) study inspired the

design for my research, she used a qualitative analysis to investigate how discourse in the media is contributing to individual's perceptions of real rape situations. Qualitative research is a broad term for a variety of research methods that aim to describe and elucidate individual's experiences as they appear in people's lives (Polkinghorne, 2005). A qualitative design focuses on using visual and textual data to evaluate a specific social phenomenon (Saldana, 2011) such as the representation of rape in the media, and therefore for this investigation a qualitative approach was chosen over a quantitative approach. Qualitative research allows the researcher to analyse data flexibly; this is beneficial as this investigation is not intent on proving or disproving a hypothesis but aims to research a topic that does not have a definite answer (Becker et al 2012).

Data collection:

15-40 units of meaning were collected for the data as advised for media text studies (Morant, 1998). All UK reports gathered were dated between 2016- 2018 ensuring that opinions were contemporary and from a range of on-line sources: The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Independent, The Guardian and the BBC. This was to ensure a variety of opinions were explored as well as reducing the effect of potential bias expressed by one source. Once the data was gathered it was reduced by focusing on those reports which held the most information and opinions about the victims and perpetrators in rape cases.

Data analysis:

Once the data was collected it was analysed using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. The term discourse describes 'language in use, or the way language is used in a social context to "enact" activities and identities' (Gee,1990 p 103). Discourse analysis is an umbrella term for a variety of methods for studying how language is used in text and contexts (Gee,2010). Although discourse analysis methods differ, they share a strong epistemology with social constructionism, which states that language is much more than just a mirror of phenomena and the world. They emphasise that discourse is primarily important in constructing ideas, social process and phenomena that make up our social world (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013).

Van Dijk (2004 p352) states that "a CDA is a type of Discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power and abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" i.e. it offers an explanation for why discourse works. CDA considers language as a social practice and emphasises that language use in a social context can be of great importance (Wodak, 2000). Carter (1997) argues that the aim of CDA is to uncover ideological assumptions and impositions of power in text that ordinary readers fail to notice and to discover hidden power relations in text and uncover inequalities and biases. There are three analytical concepts within a CDA: interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. Interpretative repertoires in social psychology refers to how individuals talk about the social world through common sense and often contradictory ways. They are made up of lexicons of cultural ideas, common knowledge and explanations that everyone is familiar with. They are drawn on by everyone 'to build explanations, descriptions, accounts and arguments' (Potter and Wetherwell,1987 p.138). Edeley (2001 p203) further explains them as 'the building blocks of conversation'. Ideological dilemmas are produced through an

understanding of these complex but contradictory common-sense principles (Seu,2016). They are lived ideologies that explain and interpret discourse as they are put to work to win an argument (Edeley,2001). Subject positions are culturally available categories that individuals can choose to define themselves and their identity (Torren,2001)

A CDA can be beneficial when analysing newspapers. In contemporary society the media constructs views through newspapers and other media platforms which influence how readers think about certain social phenomena (Matheson, 2005). Journalists will often claim that they report non-biased views of social phenomena. However, a CDA can uncover biased reporting through the analysis of leading language (Matheson, 2005).

The data analysis was conducted in six steps as advised by Horton-Salway (2007): The first step was to look for patterns, I initially analysed all my news articles separately, looking how each article's language contributed to the social construction of rape, while thinking about all three key analytical concepts. After identifying how all the different interpretive repertoires and subject positions related, I considered how the discourse was being used in context of the specific article and if there were variations across the sources. The next step was to examine how the interpretive repertoires were used as lived ideologies and how they were used to deploy a winning argument and provide alternative explanations during social interactions. I then described what I found through the whole data set, and evaluated and considered the implications of my findings. The final step of my analysis was to reflect on what might have influenced me in my collection and interpretation of the data.

Ethical considerations:

There are few ethical considerations for this investigation. The British Psychological Society (2014) has an ethical code to which all psychological research must adhere and this research therefore must meet both their ethical guidelines and the ones specified by Manchester Metropolitan University (Appendix 1). The data collected was from publicly available online sources therefore consent was not required. A CDA is based on the researcher's personal opinions, therefore ethical considerations should be considered when expressing an opinion.

Analysis and Discussion:

Drunk and asking for it

A continuing theme throughout the articles is that journalists describe the behaviour of the victim by reference to how much she drank, negatively impacting how she is represented.

Extract one: 'That's what the app is for' Man accused of raping tinder date at party 'felt entitled to sex because he met her on dating app'. (Appendix 2)

The article discusses a woman inviting Correia to a party after meeting him on tinder which led to her being raped. The article constantly uses words associated with the woman being intoxicated such as '*party'* and *'drunk'*. Stereotypical drunk women are perceived as sexually promiscuous (George et al, 1983) and women who engage in binge drinking activities are thought to be more likely to engage in risky sexual activity (Piombo and Piles,1996). Intoxication alters perceptions, decreases reaction

times and impairs an individual's ability to make good decisions. This leads to an impairment in effectively communicating, individuals misinterpreting cues and an inability to physically resist being assaulted (Cowley,2013). Since in contemporary society an adult party will usually involve alcohol, the word '*party'* therefore implies that the victim was bound to be drunk, consent to sexual intercourse and not able to provide a credible account of what happened. The victim is later described as *'drunk'* confirming the readers' suspicions that she was intoxicated during the rape, providing more reason to discredit her account of the rape. Overall it reinforces the impression she may have initiated the sexual encounter with the perpetrator, leading him to have misinterpreted these signs as consent to engage in sex. Similarly, the journalist writes:

'*Mr Anderson told the jury they should not trust the alleged victim's memory because she was drunk. He said, "if you can't rely on her memory, you have to acquit Mr Correia, you can't convict on suspicion… suspicion and sympathy have no role"'*

This can create an impression on the reader that the woman was drunk enough for her memory to be impaired and her recall of the night possibly inaccurate, thus discrediting her account and making the perpetrator's story more believable and perceive the sex as probably consensual. Throughout the story there is no mention of how much the perpetrator drank, which gives the impression he was not drunk. In turn this makes his version of events more trustworthy and true as he is perceived as accurately remembering the night. However, even in cases where the newspapers comment on how much the perpetrator drank, research has shown that in rape cases being drunk works as a justification or an extenuating circumstance that reduces the blame of the perpetrator (Abrahams et al, 2006) while intoxicated women who are raped are held responsible for putting themselves in danger (Finch and Munro,2007).

Extract two: student at top university 'laughed and pushed victim around like a rag doll during alleged rape'. (Appendix 3)

This is another article that consistently uses words to describe how drunk the victim was and her behaviour that night, talking about how the victim '*stumbled home'* and was '*unable to speak coherently'*, implying she had drunk too much and was unable to look after herself. Later in the article, the victim is described as '*very very very drunk*' by using the word '*very'* three times it emphasises how drunk she is, giving a similar impression to that in extract one, that the victim's memory of the account is unreliable and therefore she can't be trusted. Constantly representing the victim as drunk is problematic, as it does not contribute materially to the story, and reinforces rape myths. The way journalist talks about the victim's behaviour also represents her as irresponsible, therefore of bad character and not trustworthy, again leading readers to perceive the perpetrator as more believable. This can unintentionally discredit the violence against the victim and takes away responsibility from the assailants, portraying the victim as a catalyst to rape (O'Hara, 2012). Talking about how much she drunk perpetrates the idea that the victim asked for it or brought it on herself because she was too intoxicated to be able to defend herself. Interestingly the victim also perceived her behaviour as her fault:

'*she blamed herself for earlier in the evening for becoming so drunk at a house party that she was unable to defend herself'*.

The fact that the victim blames herself for the rape is consistent with Williams (2007) who states that women have been socialised to take social and moral responsibility of controlling men's behaviour by restricting their own and acting appropriately. The language used gives the readers the impression that if a woman gets drunk she is to blame for an assault as she puts herself in a vulnerable position and is not able to defend herself against deviant men. This gives the impression that women are responsible for keeping themselves safe, teaching them that rape is inevitable, but they can prevent it using several strategies such as avoiding drinking too much. This implies that women need to learn strategies on how not to get raped instead of teaching men not to rape. This is problematic as Meyer (2010) states, individuals will perceive female binge drinking rather than male sexual aggression to be the cause of rape, wrongly reversing the blame onto women.

She's guilty until proved innocent

The second theme highlights how journalists discredit the victim's account of the rape by using leading words that favour the perpetrator's story.

Extract three: 'I wanted it to be over so I took my top off': woman who claims she was raped by two Ireland rugby stars says she was 'ordered' to get undressed during alleged assault in player's bedroom'. (Appendix 4)

The headline in this article itself uses leading language with the word *'claims'* when describing what the victim had said. The word *'claims'* is often used to describes a statement without proof or evidence, this can be problematic because it can give off the impression that there is no evidence for what the victim has said. Consequently, this makes the victim look like she is lying and unable to provide a reliable account, supporting Payne's (1999) findings that women are perceived as lying about being raped.

'*The claimant was "petrified" that the woman might start filming her.'*

The woman here is described as a '*claimant'* which can influence the reader's perception of her; she has not been recognised as a victim of rape, creating a lack of sympathy for the victim and expressing doubt that the sexual intercourse was non-consensual. The word *'claimant'* also again implies there is no evidence for what she is saying and emphasises the suggestion to the readers that she is lying. The word *"petrified"* in quotation marks is as an example of scare quotes where the writer wants to distance themselves from the word as they deem it to be inappropriate (Predeli et al, 2013). Readers assume that the journalist disagrees that the woman was petrified during the rape and it implies that what happened was consensual and she is now lying about it. The legal definition of rape lies in what the perpetrator believes was consent, defining rape according to the perpetrator's beliefs rather than the victim's (Larcombe, 2016). This places responsibility on the woman to prove that she was not consenting to the sexual intercourse. By using words like claim it implies that the woman has made a false allegation of rape, reinforcing the rape myth that women lie about being raped. According to Gavey and Glow (2001) this may explain why many people perceive most rape cases to be false as victims are often perceived as liars and untrustworthy.

Extract 4: 'YOU KNOW YOU WANT THIS' What England Under 20 rugby star 'told woman he met on Tinder as he repeatedly raped her. (Appendix 5)

Throughout this article the woman is referred to as an *'alleged victim'*. The definition of alleged refers to something that has been stated but not necessarily confirmed, as in extract three the woman is perceived as a liar as she has no evidence for her claim. The term '*allege'* suggests readers should be wary of believing what has been said reinforcing the rape myth that women lie about being raped due to regret. Allege is a problematic word to use as it puts the women on trial instead of the perpetrator. The woman must convince readers that she was raped and had not consented to sexual intercourse, rather than the man needing to convince readers that the sex was consensual. This is consistent with Gavey (2005) who states that in modern day society rape is treated like a crime against the victim and they are put on trial as well as the perpetrator, leaving the women powerless in having control over the situation. This can lead to secondary victimisation because the readers will often judge whether consent was given by the actions of the victim rather than the perpetrator (Tiersman, 2008) so when using words like *'claim'* and *'allege'* it reinforces the idea that women are lying about being raped and consequently discredits their account.

This fundamentally shows bias in reporting of rapes in the media. Williams (1984) found for other crimes such as robbery the word allege is not used to describe the victim, therefore responsibility of the victim is never questioned but for rape victims it is almost always questioned. For more neutral reporting words such as defendant and prosecutor would be more effective. Discrediting the victim endorses rape myths which can increase the likelihood that an individual will side with the defendant (Levenson and D'Amora, 2007).

He is not the type to rape

Following the analysis, most articles made positive comments about the perpetrator which represented them as having a good character. This was consistent with Bonnes' (2013) findings that showed newspapers will often humanise the perpetrator.

Extract three: 'I wanted it to be over so I took my top off': woman who claims she was raped by two Ireland rugby stars says she was 'ordered' to get undressed during alleged assault in player's bedroom' (Appendix 4)

The title itself describes the two men as *'stars'*, the word star refers to someone who is highly celebrated in a field or profession. This gives the reader the impression they are likeable men, well-known due to their celebrity status, and readers may find them more credible as they feel that they know and trust them. The perpetrators are described as having a celebrity status, giving the perpetrator the benefit of the doubt that they would not be the type of person who would rape. This leads to the victim being perceived is someone looking for media attention (Knight et al, 2001). The article goes on to mention their accomplishments describing them as *'international rugby players'*:

'a woman claims that she was ordered to get undressed by two Irish international rugby players'

'International' implies that they are well known around the world and good enough rugby players to play globally. These comments make the perpetrators seem more likeable not only to people who know of them but also those who have not heard of them before. Talking about their accomplishments, humanises the perpetrators as it gives details about their lives, readers start to perceive the perpetrators as having

good character and less likely to perceive them as a type of person that would rape someone. This supports Franiuk et al (2008b) that newspapers often make positive comments about the perpetrator and constantly talk about their achievements with little references about the positive characteristics of victims. This can further bias opinion suggesting the perpetrator has an honest character while assuming the victim is a liar as the readers do not know her well enough to assume she is telling the truth. This is problematic as by describing the perpetrators' accomplishments does not provide evidence that the sex was consensual but reinforces several rape myths that the victim is lying and she wanted it.

Extract Five: University student accuses friend of rape after 'waking up to find herself on top of him in bed', court hears. (Appendix 6)

Throughout the article it makes references to the victim and Josh being friends and describes the relationship between them as '*platonic'*. This is consistent with Bonnes (2013) that newspapers often describe the perpetrator and victim as good friends, therefore taking attention away from the rape and placing blame on external factors.

 'She knew very early on that he was physically attracted to her but she didn't share that and that was communicated to him and was respected. It appeared that the defendant had accepted that they would be no more than friends'.

The words '*communicated'* and '*respected'* firstly suggest that they were close enough to adequately understand each other's behaviours and what they meant, therefore Josh was unlikely to misinterpret the signals his friend was giving off. Secondly it implies to the readers that Josh understood and was respectful of his friend's wish not to have a romantic relationship and cared about her enough not to try pursuing anything. The readers are left questioning why Josh suddenly wanted to pursue more if he had accepted their platonic relationship and leads to the impression that the woman must have communicated a sexual interest in him. Describing the perpetrator and victim as good friends also draws attention away from the rape as it concentrates on the friendship rather than rape. The reader may also assume that good friends would not treat each other that way, implying that the woman must have been giving off signals that she wanted to engage in sexual activity with him, which once again leads to victim blaming tendencies.

The fact that it concentrates on the relationship between the two rather than the rape it reinforces stereotypical sexual scripts that rape is surprise attack by a stranger in deserted place (Mairer,2008) leading readers to define rape more narrowly than the definition provided by the law so leading to further victim blaming tendencies (Peterson and Muehlenhard,2004). However, these results were inconsistent with los and Charmard's (1997) findings that in cases of acquaintance rape the article tends to concentrate on the victim's behaviour. Although the article refers to how much the victim drank it concentrates on the friendship. These can have similar effects for victim blaming tendencies but could show potential shift from traditional to contemporary beliefs that a woman's perceived behaviour should not make her responsible for her rape.

Extract two: student at top university 'laughed and pushed victim around like a rag doll during alleged rape'. (Appendix 3)

Alister is described positively in several aspects of the article. It constantly refers to Alister's role as a counsellor for Durham university. Counsellors are stereotypically

seen as supportive, trustworthy, caring individuals that someone can turn to when in danger, implying that Alister has all these qualities. The readers start to get a sense of Alister's character and just like in extract three the readers perceive him as not the type of individual to rape someone, perpetuating the rape myth that women lie about being raped.

'I remember waking up and seeing him open a condom packet. I tried to sit up but he pushed me down like a rag doll'

By talking about the use of a condom it raises questions about the authenticity of the rape. A man who puts on a condom before sexual intercourse shows concern for his own and the woman's sexual health. It highlights that Alister is responsible as he wants to practise safe sex, it also highlights that he cares about the woman, as he wants to make sure she does not get a sexually transmitted infection or pregnant. A study by Davis et al (2008) found that up to 40% of rapists do not wear a condom during an attack and this may have contributed to a common misconception that rapist do not wear condoms. Alister's use of a condom therefore contradicts the idea that he has raped someone giving the impression that he perceived there was consent for the sexual intercourse. By talking about Alister's good qualities readers are left with the impression that he was a good person, not the type of individual to rape and liable to give a credible account of events.

These findings are inconsistent with Mason and Monckonton-Smith (2008) who found that journalists often describe perpetrators as 'beasts' or 'monsters' to reinforce the separation between rapists and ordinary men. However, this may be because the articles consist of rape cases where there is still no verdict, so describing them men in this way can be biased as they may not be deserving of that label. Future research could concentrate on looking at the difference in language used before verdict has been reached and after.

Conclusion:

The present research was conducted to contribute to existing research on how the media constructs rape. It looked at reporting that often leaves readers with victim blaming tendencies by focusing on how the victim dressed or behaved, while simultaneously reflecting perpetrators' good character by talking about their accomplishments. This reinforces rape myths for individuals who already believe in them, as well as developing those views in people who previously did not (Bohner,2001).

This study has presented an insight into the difference in power relations represented in the media between males and females. It has helped to show how rape reporting perpetuates the belief: that women should take moral responsibility over male behaviour by inhibiting their own, nice men do not rape, and women are guilty of lying about being raped unless they can prove otherwise. Through emotive language such as the use of claimant and allege, stress on the victim's behaviour by constantly referencing how drunk she was and emphasising the perpetrators achievements through words such as star and counsellor, Individuals are being socialised to believe that women are responsible for getting raped.

In conclusion news reporting does reinforce rape myths through how it represents the rape victim and perpetrator, and can contribute to rape being defined far more narrowly by society than the law. The articles used were from cases reported before

a final verdict had been made. It would be interesting to compare the discourse used when describing the victim and perpetrator both prior to and after the verdict to see if the same victim blaming tendencies occur. This investigation aims to help individuals gain insight in how the media uses leading language which often negatively impacts the victims. It hopes to help individuals re-evaluate what is considered rape without being restricted by the ideology of the media. This will hopefully lead to more victims coming forward as they recognise that what happened to them was rape and have a decreased fear of secondary victimisation. It should also lead to an increase of conviction rates in courts for rapists as juries will be less likely to believe rape myths.

Reflexive analysis:

Using Willig (2013) aspects of reflexivity, I drew upon my own personal and epistemological perspectives of the research and how it influenced my findings.

When deciding the topic for my third-year project I chose to investigate the social construction of rape because it has become all too common in contemporary society for girls to experience sexual harassment and dismiss it. However, to reduce bias, I chose to narrow down the topic further to rape, as I had no personal experiences of it. I perceived that my own personal beliefs had influenced my research, as I strongly believe that the development and acceptance of rape myths has contributed to victims of rape failing to report the crime and to the low conviction rates seen in court, thus making it difficult to remain completely objective in my study which can have potentially produced bias in my analysis. An example of this can be seen in my data collection as I was sure that all the news reporting would use victim blaming language, narrowing down the readers definition of rape. However, I found that a few used language showing sympathy for the victim. Consequently, this may have led to confirmation bias when eliminating sources based on their relevance.

The research was designed to review the way news reporting uses leading language that influences representations of rape but was limited to the opinions reflected within the news. I find it too deterministic to suggest that all individual's opinions are shaped by the news. Therefore, the research could be investigated differently through focus groups by giving the participants different scenarios of rape and getting them to discuss whether they perceived it to be rape. This would provide further knowledge of how individuals define rape as well as their reasons for it.

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