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# Media Rape: Press Coverage of Sexual Assault Cases

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**MEDIA RAPE:  
PRESS COVERAGE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES**

**by**

**Megan M. Murphy  
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1994**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty**

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**University of North Dakota**

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**for the degree of**

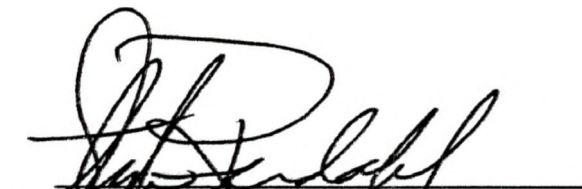
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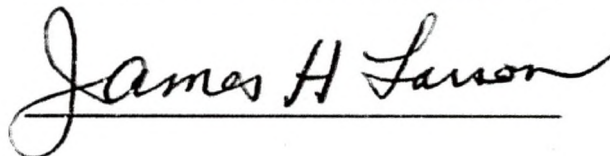
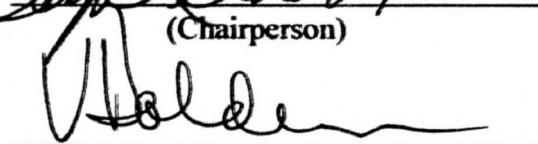
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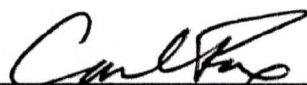
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## ABSTRACT

In 1989, a female jogger was raped, beaten and left for dead in New York City's Central Park. Two years later, a woman was attacked on a beach in Palm Beach, Florida. She reported to police that she had been raped. Both cases were covered extensively by the media, but the press treated the victims very differently. Throughout their analysis, reporters painted the Central Park jogger as an innocent victim, while the woman who accused Smith of rape was depicted as a deserving tramp.

Assuming a primarily qualitative approach, this research used frame analysis to examine *The New York Times* coverage of the Central Park jogger and Smith rape cases. The study begins by discussing how news coverage divides female victims of male violence into two categories: innocent women; or women who provoked their own suffering. The study then analyzed why some rape victims are treated with reverence, while others are vilified. The theoretical premises of framing theory, focusing on the complex intertwining of race, gender and class, was then examined. The study developed through a systematic search for descriptive words and an analysis of the content of the selected articles looked for evidence of rape myths. Finally, the number of female and male reporters was discussed.



In an effort to decide if media coverage is responsible enough to warrant openly naming rape victims without their consent, the study ends with five conclusions. First, *The New York Times* articles about the Central Park jogger case and the Smith case did contain sexist descriptive words, though they did not appear as frequently as expected. Second, substantial evidence supported the belief that reporters rely on rape myths to cover this crime. Third, there were so few female reporters covering these two cases that the researcher determined that a strong comparison between female and male reporters' use of descriptive words and rape myths was not possible. Fourth, the researcher determined that female victims of rape are either treated like a "virgin" or a "vamp" by the news media. Finally, the study determined that the media is not responsible enough to warrant openly naming rape victims without their consent.

**To my husband,  
for painting my life cerulean blue**

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Central Park Jogger and William Kennedy Smith Rape Cases**

On April 19, 1989, a 28-year-old woman on a late-night run through the northern end of New York City's Central Park was set upon by a marauding band of as many as 12 black and Hispanic teenagers. She was raped, severely beaten and left for dead. The woman was found naked in a mud puddle, gagged with her own bloody shirt. Doctors estimate she lost three quarters of her blood in the assault's aftermath.

As the racially divisive case ground through the criminal justice system, it quickly took on a surreal life of its own. Deeply suspicious of police and prosecutors, many blacks believed the defendants were being railroaded. They resented the press attention to the affluent, white victim in a city where persons of color were far more likely to be victims of violent crime. Some believed the teenager's videotaped confessions had been coerced and they publicly cried that the physical evidence never conclusively linked the youths to the jogger. For whites, the crime compounded stereotypical myths and intensified fears about underclass pathology. The nadir came when the jogger herself, scarred and walking unsteadily, told her story on the stand, only to be jeered by protesters as she left the courthouse.

City newspapers described the jogger as a pretty, blond investment banker with a future. Two African-American newspapers, *The New York City Sun* and *The*

*Amsterdam News*, published the victim's name. Mainstream American media chose not to follow suit. The editor of *The New York Post* explained by saying, "What we want to avoid is, a year from now, she buys a blouse from Bloomingdale's and hands her credit card to the clerk who says, 'Oh yeah, you're the one who got gang-raped in Central Park'" (quoted by Cooper and Whitehouse, 1995, p. 1).

Deliberations of the two month trial for three of the six young men accused of attacking the woman known only as the Central Park jogger took 10 days. Fueled by the media frenzy surrounding the case and the historical undertones that define interracial rape, tensions in the city escalated. Outside the courthouse, daily demonstrations focused on race and the name debate. In anger and frustration over the injustices they felt were occurring, protesters shouted the victim's towards news cameras. The editorial pages were filled with essays questioning whether a rape victim deserves the right to accuse and remain anonymous.

When the verdict was read on August 18, 1990, a racially divided courtroom exploded. Jury members found the three teenagers innocent in the case's most serious charge, attempted murder, but found them guilty of assault, riot and rape. In December 1990, during a second trial, two more defendants were found guilty of sexual abuse and assault of the jogger. Many believed history had been repeated, but justice had not been served.

Two years after the Central Park attack, in the early morning hours of March 30, 1991, William Kennedy Smith and Patricia Bowman had sexual intercourse on a beach in

Florida. This time, the accused was a medical student at Georgetown University and the nephew of Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy. The 30-year-old Smith was later to testify that they had engaged in an act of consensual sex. His accuser, a 29-year-old Jupiter, Florida, woman, told jurors she had been raped.

Due to the prominent people staying at the Palm Beach estate that Easter weekend, Senator Kennedy was there as well as his son, Patrick, a Rhode Island state legislator, media coverage of the event was intense. Virtually all of the mainstream media covering the incident followed conventional practice and did not identify Bowman as Smith's accuser. But one month after the attack, the media free-for-all surrounding the case took a vicious turn as *The New York Times*, following the lead of NBC, which followed the lead of the supermarket tabloid *Globe*, went public with the woman's name—and a whole lot more. A slanted profile of Bowman played on the public's belief of rape myths and made Bowman look like a woman who asked to be raped. Following unconventional journalistic practices, the story dug deeply into Bowman's private life, painting a picture of a loose woman, a floozy—a deserving victim. The "follow-up" profile of Smith, published almost one month later, did not share similarly damaging and irrelevant information.

Bowman passed two polygraph tests and a voice-stress analysis during the investigation. She stuck to her story through five grueling interrogations by police and prosecutors and a three-day deposition by the defense. The bruises on her body were

consistent with the attack she described. Even so, a jury found Smith not guilty after only 77 minutes of deliberation.

In the cases described, one victim was protected by the mainstream press, while the other was vilified. Why? What factors contributed to the decision made in certain media organizations to break with unwritten tradition and name Smith's accuser? Was it because those in the media felt a connection with the jogger and with Smith? Successful and affluent, the Central Park jogger could have been their daughter, just as Smith could have been their son. In a story in *The St. Petersburg Times*, rape survivor Susan Estrich, a law professor at the University of Southern California, asked,

Has so much changed in the last month? Has the stigma magically lifted, as waves of rape victims begin marching to police stations? Or could it be ... that an investment banker jogging alone in Central Park is a more deserving victim than a working-class girl who climbed up the social ladder and went for drinks at a man's house at 3:30 a.m.? (quoted by Cooper & Whitehouse, 1995, p. 1)

Fear that they will be treated like Bowman stops many women from reporting rapes to authorities. In 1992, a government-funded study by the National Victim Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center titled *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation*, found that 67% of the rape survivors interviewed said that a law prohibiting news media from releasing their names would make them more likely to report the crime ("Rape Figures," 1992). The fear and public humiliation are real, even though a name is not important to the public.

The media shapes our understanding of the world around us. It also affects the way we live our lives. The news defines the boundaries of appropriate behavior and tells us the punishment for transgression. It warns women which actions and locations and unsafe, influencing decisions about how to act, what to wear and where to go and when. News stories also construe how society views violence against women, defining the crime of rape in the process. Media scholars Helen Benedict (1992) and Marian Meyers (1997) state that news coverage divides female victims of male violence into innocent women—virgins—or women who provoked or caused their own suffering—vamps. Guided by patriarchal cultural assumptions, stereotypes and social notions, journalists have declared women who follow the “rules” as true victims of the crime, while other women are seen as deserving their “punishment.”

Violence against women is framed by the news so as to support, sustain, and reproduce male supremacy. Because coverage is rooted in cultural myths and stereotypes about women, men, and violence, the links between sexist violence, social structures, and gendered patterns of domination and control are disguised. The result is that the representation of women who are victims of sexist violence polarizes around the culturally defined “virgin-whore” or “good girl-bad girl” dichotomy so that women appear to either be innocent or to blame for their victimization. (Meyers, 1997, pp. 8-9)

In her book *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes*, Benedict (1992) concluded that a rape victim will be labeled as a “virgin” or a “vamp” by the press

depending on eight variables. According to Benedict, a victim will be pushed into the role of vamp:

1. If she knows her assailant.
2. If no weapon is used.
3. If she is of the same race as the assailant.
4. If she is of the same class as the assailant.
5. If she is of the same ethnic group as the assailant.
6. If she is young.
7. If she is "pretty."
8. If she in any way deviated from the traditional female sex role of being at home with family or children.

Benedict (1992) also stressed that other rape myths are inherent in crime reporting, making it seem as if a victim is to blame for the crime committed against her. Benedict, Meyers (1997), therapist Ron Thorne-Finch (1992) and feminist John Stoltenberg (1989) all discuss common rape myths in their work. The most commonly analyzed myths include:

- Rape is a crime of passion or lust.
- Rapists are perverted, crazy or mentally ill.
- Rapists are motivated by lust or uncontrollable urges.
- Rapes do not occur in the home.
- Rapists are black or lower class men.



- Women provoke rape.
- Only “loose” women are raped.
- Raped women are “used” women.
- Rape is a punishment for past deeds.
- Women cry rape for revenge.
- Rapes only occur by strangers.
- Women secretly enjoy being raped.
- If a victim does not struggle or use physical force to resist, there has been no rape.

This study will look for examples of these myths in the newspaper stories describing the Smith and Central Park jogger rape cases.

CHAPTER 2:  
LITERATURE REVIEW: PART ONE

The Art of Framing

Rape. The word itself resonates with a horror chamber of meanings. From the insidiousness of date rape to the sudden, brutal back alley attack, rape violates a woman's very being. It is a crime of unspeakable violence. The statistics are horrifying enough to make a mother rush her daughters into hiding—and perhaps join them. According to the *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation* study, 683,000 women 18 years of age and older are raped each year in the United States—five times the number estimated by the Bureau of Justice statistics. One rape occurs every 46 seconds, making a staggering one in eight American women a victim of this terrible crime. In almost 80% of cases the victim knew her rapist. However, as testimony to the continued stigma of rape, only 16% of assaults are reported. Many victims feel it is a private matter and/or they fear reprisal from the assailant. Half the victims surveyed said they would be “much more likely” to go to the police if assured their name would not be used (“Rape Figures,” 1992).

What images do you conjure up when you think of rape? Do you visualize a large black man with a knife jumping out from a dark alley onto an unsuspecting white female? Many media consumers classify this mythological view of the crime as “real” rape. Unfortunately, this is also true of many journalists. As the violent tragedy is set to

written word, news stories violate rape victims again, forcing them to walk into a story that already has a frame.

Serving as the “eyes” and “ears” of society, media plays an important role in disseminating information and shaping “reality.” We rely on the media to inform us about what has happened, why it happened, who was affected by the action, and who or what was responsible for the event. This is especially true as technology expands and grows in new directions, making the power of the media almost omnipotent. The media coverage of the Central Park jogger rape case and the Smith rape case shows how differently news stories present the crime depending on the circumstances surrounding the rape, and how coverage of this crime reflects the biases of our patriarchal society.

According to traditional thought on journalism, reporters merely observe events. They are not supposed to change events, to distort events, or to encourage or discourage them from taking place. Journalists should not, outside of their editorials and opinion columns, include their opinion of events in their stories. What this means is that those wielding the objectivity ax presume that the bias of their own norm is so—well, normal—that it constitutes no bias at all.

Of course, this theory of supposition of non-bias suffers from severe limitations. Sometimes, the very presence of a reporter, particularly a reporter accompanied by a camera, can affect the way potential newsmakers behave. Though their bias may seem to be invisible, the decisions reporters make also inevitably affect their audiences' perceptions of events—including such seemingly obvious decisions as ignoring the dull

parts of a crime and focusing on the lurid details. Even the most scrupulous reporters have difficulty preventing their mind-sets, if not their hopes and frustrations, from affecting their coverage of events. For this reason, each story is a presentation of the event, not an exact replication of every reality about the event.

Framing theory is one way to explain the “presentation” method journalists use to tell a story. To produce entertaining, intelligible stories, journalists frequently depend on familiar themes or frames to describe an event. Familiar frames make the work of a journalist easier by enabling them to “process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognize it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7).

Erving Goffman (1974) theorized that people make sense of everyday situations by organizing their thoughts and experiences in a series of frames based on their prior knowledge. Frames serve as translation tools or interpretive packages, which classify, organize and transform events into images the public will understand. As each event is recapped, reporters frame the news story, or give it perspective and interpretation. The opinions, prejudices and beliefs of journalists can affect the angle from which they portray a news story. Each time we read a news story, we are seeing the events through the screen of someone else’s perception (Tuchman, 1978).

Recapping the events of each day, media work to create a second reality for the public by exposing them to events and experiences that they have not encountered in their own lives. When an individual is already familiar with an event, the media frame will

simply become another input into the reality of that person. The problem lies in events with which the public is not already familiar.

Most people do not know—or do not know they know—a rape victim. Most people do not even know someone who has been the victim of any serious personal assault. Therefore, given the dearth of firsthand information most people have about violent crime, the media play a vital role in creating for the public the vicarious reality about criminal victimization, and about the capacity (or incapacity) of American society's institutions to deal with it. (Gordon & Riger, 1989, p. 67)

The media frame is profoundly influential because it appears to be grounded in everyday reality. Throughout mainstream media, a story is continually reported with a certain slant, marginalizing, trivializing and constructing as deviant any details that challenge the reporter's account of the event. This process disguises consensus by making the prevailing ideology “appear natural, inevitable, commonsensical, and consensual” (Meyers, 1999, p. 7). As the media story is diffused through society, it becomes the public “reality.” Instead of truly reflecting reality, media frames present the cultural biases and views of the dominant group in our society. Supporting the interests of the status quo, media frames present a white, middle class, male perspective. “Maleness is the norm and whiteness is the ‘norm.’ The set of viewpoints, ideas, and attitudes that often comes with being male or being white is seen as neutral and unbiased” (Rivers, 1996, p. 7). By representing a reality that appears to be more natural than the

circumstances involved in the lives of the “other” groups, the media keep them subordinate (Meyers, 1999).

A media frame can actually define an event. In the reporting process, the media frame imparts character to an event by selectively attributing certain details to describe the event. Tuchman (1978) used a riot as an example by pointing out that journalists can “shape the public definition of what a riot is” so strongly that “ultimately, social scientists may use the newspaper account as though it were a veridical depiction of the occurrence, as though the news story were the event” (p. 191). Naturally, frames can create and embellish problems as they often “resonate with cultural narrations, that is, with the stories, myths, and folk tales that are part and parcel of one’s cultural heritage,” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 5). Many journalists, working against tight deadlines, find it simply easier to report using myths than to do an in-depth analysis of a crime. Continued use of standby story packages forces the public to view rape stories through the stereotypical lens of lynchings, white virgins, black rapists and black whores; pictures that consumers may find impossible to separate from reality.

Tuchman (1978) voiced concern about the accuracy of frames presented by the news media. Her apprehension lie in the fact that the meanings suggested by frames rely heavily on prior experiences and unquestioned beliefs, making the perspective of the presenter and interpreter of the frame extremely important. Subtle alterations in the way a frame is presented can affect the way in which consumers understand the news. By

elevating certain facts while downplaying others, journalists have the power to change the underlying meaning of a story (Rivers, 1996).

Source choice is an imperative part of the media frame. Sources bring credibility and structure to a story. The source sets up an immediate frame of reference, bringing the event alive for the audience (Gamson, 1984). Journalists often attempt to balance a story by presenting different sources with varying viewpoints. Commonly, stories are biased towards the “official” position, as other sources are seen as being biased or as being advocates.

Once I was doing an article for a newspaper in which I used as my major sources a black academician and a female professor. But an editor asked me to add another source, a white male professor who had no history of research in the area.

Clearly, the editor simply did not have confidence in the ‘facts’ offered by the woman and the black, believing—probably subconsciously—that they were somehow suspect. When my source was a white male, I have never been asked to go and find a woman or a black to bolster the credibility of the information, but the reverse has often been true. (Rivers, 1996, p. 13)

Reporters fishing for sources with the traditional “news net” make it difficult, if not impossible, to find a minority voice in stories. In rape stories, as in most crime stories, the “objective” voice is that of the police. Rape crisis counselors and feminists are rarely quoted because they are seen as biased. As victims may feel apprehensive about telling their stories to the press, the voice of a sexual assault expert is critical to

provide an accurate article. Supplementing the reporter's own knowledge of the crime, experts provide a credible analysis of rape and its underlying meanings (Byerly, 1995).

Economics play a role in the framing of stories. Media personnel have become more upscale and the images we receive reflect this economic elitism.

We walk around with media-generated images of the world, using them to construct meaning about political and social issues. The lens through which we receive these images is neutral but evinces the power and point of view of the political and economic elites who operate and focus it. And the special genius of this system is to make the whole process seem so normal and natural that the very art of social construction is invisible. (Gamson et al., 1992, p. 374)

Today, there are few reporters from working-class neighborhoods. The "middle classing" of journalism has created a social distance from oppressed minorities. Reporters "don't often realize that decisions about what is—or is not—'news' grow out of a lifetime of experiences. Class, race, sex—all these have profound influence" (Rivers, 1996, p. xiii). Management of most media organizations is made up of white males. Though racial minorities make up fully one quarter of the U.S. population, they amount to less than 8% of newsroom supervisors at the nation's newspapers (Solomon & Cohen, 1997).

Omissions of detail in a story are also very important. "Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omissions of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding an audience" (Entman, 1993, p. 54). People use the stories they read to gauge



their own dangers. When reporters fail to mention the relationship between an abuser and a victim, it can make every rape story seem like stranger rape. When there are not details to tell otherwise, consumers fill in the gaps with their own stereotypical version of a rape scene. Besides what is reported and omitted, frames can also infer causality simply by presenting one action in an occurrence as an antecedent and another as the consequence (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). This subtle framing can make it seem as though one party in a dispute is to blame for the event. For example, if a reporter notes that a rape victim had been drinking in a bar all evening while her young children were at home alone, the story makes it seem like the woman deserved the punishment—rape—for abandoning her kids.

Finally, the choice of language shapes the story. Events are often labeled according to the media definition. These definitions become so ingrained in our minds that they often become our only definition. According to Tuchman (1978), “Discussions of the antiwar movement still reflect the media’s language. For instance, young men who refused to serve in Vietnam are commonly referred to as draft ‘evaders’ (the media’s term), rather than draft ‘resisters,’ as they prefer to be called” (p. 2). Choosing one word over another affects perceptions and reactions and can raise or lower expectations about event participants.

Choices of words and their organization into news stories are not trivial matters. They hold great power in setting the context for debate, defining issues under consideration, summoning a variety of mental representations, and providing the basic tools to discuss the issues at hand. (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 70)

And, even when a reporter writes a great story, if a sensationalist headline is added, the story may be the same, but the idea conveyed is different.

Benedict (1992) believes that the English vocabulary is extremely sexist. On page 20 in her book *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes* she notes that:

- There are more words for women than men.
- There are more positive words for men than women.
- Many more words for women have sexual overtones than words for men.
- There are 220 words for a sexually promiscuous female and only 20 for a promiscuous male.
- There are no words in English for a strong female—no semantic equivalent of “hero” for example (p. 20).

In general, women are associated with things negative and men positive.

According to Smith (1985), “Once a word or term becomes associated with women, it often acquires semantic characteristics that are congruent with social stereotypes and evaluations of women as a group” (p. 48). Noting that women are often described in terms of their sexual attractiveness Benedict (1992) provides a partial list of “words to watch for” in her book on pages 259-260. They are as follows: vivacious, flirtatious, girl (instead of woman), pretty, curvacious {author spelling}, blonde, bubbly, precocious, wild, pert, prudish, naïve, worldly, experienced (in the context of a love-life), mature, full-figured, attractive, doll-like, hysterical, divorcee, party-goer, stripped (in the context of a sex crime), had sex (to mean raping or being raped) and fondled (to mean molested).

**“These words, never used for men, either infantilize women ... or, in the context of a sex crime make them sound like sexual temptresses” (Benedict, 1993, p. 104). This study will look for use of these descriptive words in the examined newspaper stories.**

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW: PART TWO

#### The History of Rape Reporting

The reporting of crime is an old tradition in American journalism. Culturally defined to reflect society's dominant values, crime stories are morality tales, which identify groups and their roles as crime fighters or crime doers. Guided by a common understanding of news values, crime news reflects society's predominant values and assumptions (Meyers, 1997). Noting that the rise of newspapers coincided almost exactly with the termination of hangings, one media scholar proclaimed, "Newspapers make redundant the need for large gatherings of persons to witness punishments; instead individuals can stay at home and still be morally instructed" (quoted by Cromer, 1978, p. 226). Serving as a form of social control, crime news changes over time to correspond with shifts in societal beliefs and acceptances; though the system has been changing too slowly to help rape victims.

During the era of the penny presses in the early 1800s, newspapers began printing lurid accounts of murder and violence. *The New York Sun* was one of the first and most successful newspapers to begin the practice, starting in 1833 when it assigned police-beat reporters. As the daily summary of local crimes stories quickly become one of the most popular segments of the paper, circulation increased and other newspapers followed suit.

Attempting to gain readership, reporters tried to top the competition, searching for the most provocative and scandalous crimes to print.

In the 1920s, competition from radio and motion pictures sensationalize crime news even further. The tabloid *New York Daily News*, boasting a collection of simply written and often luridly illustrated crime stories, quickly became the daily newspaper with largest circulation in the United States. As newspaper owners witnessed the success of exploiting the human interest angle of violent crime, crime news became a staple in the American newsroom.

Until the 1930s though, the crime of rape received scant coverage because long-held traditions of victim silence and social stigma kept all but the most sensationalized reports out of the news. That is, unless a rape was given as a supposed reason for lynching (Benedict, 1992). Even though only a small percentage of lynchings revolved around charges of sexual assault, those that did received the most attention and publicity, gripping the white imagination far out of proportion to their statistical significance (Hall, 1983). In the dailies, sex crimes were described in articles that wove together themes of masculinity, rage and sexual envy with rituals of death and desire. Readers could see in the lynchers a replication of the ideal southern man—protector of women, fearless dispenser of justice and guardian of community values (Hall, 1979).

The ritual of lynching served as a dramatization of the hierarchical power relationships based on gender and on race. Throughout history, white men have used the rape of “their” women as an excuse to act against black men. Accordingly, men have used

women as verbs with which to communicate with one another. In this light, the rape of a woman is the means of communicating defeat to the men of a conquered tribe (Hall, 1983). A tool of intimidation used to keep both blacks and white women in their subordinate positions in society, lynchings were an act of terror against men's bodies, inseparable with rape, an act of violence against women's.

Women have been raped by men, most often by gangs of men, for many of the same reasons that blacks were lynched by gangs of whites: as group punishment for being uppity, for getting out of line, for failing to recognize 'one's place,' for assuming sexual freedoms, or for behavior no more provocative than walking down the wrong road at night in the wrong part of town and presenting a convenient, isolated target for group hatred and rage. (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 281)

Just as lynchings reasserted hierarchical relationships in the community, rape reasserted white male dominance and control in the home. (Hall, 1979). This dominance and control by white men in the personal sphere meant the black rapist was not the most probable source of danger for a white woman—her own husband was. White men, no matter if they owned slaves or not, thought of woman as their private property, classifying them as less than equal beings. One slave owner's wife renounced the lack of freedom in her constrictive life, declaring she was "nothing more than 'chief slave of the harem,' on her husband's plantation" (quoted by Brownmiller, 1975, p. 240).

Stifling social roles for women made lynching more than a punishment for rape, it was also a deadly deterrent against voluntary sexual relations between white women and

black men. This upheld the belief that white women, at least in relation to black men, were always objects, but never agents of sexual desire (Hall, 1979). In a society that regarded rape as the theft of a woman's most prized possession—a body reserved exclusively for her future or present husband—protection of sexually active women would have degraded the pure white women whom the law was designed to protect (Bynum, 1992). To preserve the status quo of Southern society, white women were forced to remain sexually constrained, becoming “wholly owned by the same white master who could daily violate the sexual integrity of his black female slave” (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 241).

The obsession of interracial rape and the myth of the black rapist as “a monstrous beast, crazed with lust,” (Hall, 1983, p. 334) carried over into the newspaper stories of the period. Acel Moore, an editor at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* says that still today the “demonized” black male serves as the ideal scapegoat for whites. “If you want to divert attention and not be held liable for a criminal act, all you have to do is say a black man did it and you get instant believability” (quoted by Rivers, 1996, p. 161). Murderers Charles Stuart and Susan Smith proved this true.

Suffragist and women's organizer Jessie Daniel Ames (1942) declared, “In describing the victim of an assault, newspapers use such words as ‘young, lovely, innocent, devout in her religious life, loving, affectionate; now broken and ruined, a glorious future of proud womanhood destroyed and blasted’” (p. 58). Ames claimed this method of propaganda declared that all Southern women are “pure and noble and sacred,

and all white men of the South are defenders of this purity, nobility, and sacredness against spoilation of by a Negro” (p. 58). The media also worked as a tool of intimidation by publishing special editions of papers to announce lynchings in progress.

Editors, with few exceptions, condone lynchings by offering reasons for lynchings which are in effect sympathetic excuses for defending the rights of citizens under provocation to take the law into their own hands and constitute themselves judge, jury and executioner all at the same time. The exceptions are so few, in fact, that they do not make up even a respectable minority. (Ames, 1942, p. 51)

The expansion of communications and photography during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gave reporting a vividness it had never had before, and media reports, combined with word-of-mouth, quickly spread lurid tales of lynchings throughout the South. Stories about the mob scenes containing graphic descriptions of the violence portrayed by the lynchings intimidated blacks even in areas where lynchings were uncommon occurrences by creating a climate of fear that discouraged individual or organized black assertiveness. Excerpted from an October 27, 1934, story in the *Birmingham (Alabama) Post* titled *Lynching Carried Off Almost As Advertised*, the following article contains this description from a bystander who witnessed the mob-caused death of Claude Neal, a 23-year-old black man and “confessed attacker and slayer of a white girl.”



Due to the large number of people who wanted to lynch the nigger, it was decided to do away with him first and then bring him to the Cannidy house dead.

First they cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked them.

Then they sliced his sides and stomach with knives and every now and then somebody would cut off a finger or toe. Red hot irons were used on the nigger to burn him from top to bottom. From time to time during the torture a rope would be tied around Neal's neck and he was pulled up over a limb and held there until he almost choked to death, when he would be let down and the torture begun all over again. After several hours of this punishment, they decided just to kill him. (quoted by Ginzburg, 1988, p. 222)

The article went on to report that fingers and toes from the young man's body were freely exhibited on street corners around the town, and that photographers were saying they would soon have pictures of the body on sale for 50 cents each.

Inseparable from the myth of the black rapist is the myth of the black woman as chronically promiscuous. Acceptance of sexual violence against slave women was born in the belief that black women were naturally promiscuous and wanted to engage in sexual relations with men. This myth is built on the foundation that black men are invested with animal-like sexual urges. Therefore, since black women "belong with" black men, they

must likewise be invested with bestiality, a trait that makes it simple to view them as whores instead of legitimate victims of sexual violence (Davis, 1981). Regarding any sexual relationship between black men and white woman as horrific, white men saw their own sexual straying across the color line as “welcome attention” to black women. In fact, the rape of black women by white men was a cornerstone of white supremacy, replenishing the slave labor supply while keeping black men in their place by preventing them from protecting “their” women. News stories play on this myth, relegating white women in the role of “ice goddess” in stories, while associating darkness with eroticism to project the fears and fascinations of female sexuality upon black women (Hall, 1979).

Public perceptions about and acceptance of lynchings did change, though the changes came about slowly. As the century progressed, assaults against women were given less and less often as the excuse for lynchings, largely due to the refusal of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching to allow the violence to be carried out in their names. Started in late 1930, 11 years after the enfranchisement of women, Jessie Daniel Ames organized the Association in direct response to lynch-law propaganda that declared mob violence was necessary to protect white female chastity. Working through church groups in 15 states and 1,000 counties, Association women fought to dispute the commonly held idea that blacks provoked lynchings by raping white women.

Association beliefs represented an acceptance of the accountability for a racist mythology that white women had not created, but that they nevertheless served. This

idea had continually been brought to the forefront by black women's admonitions that "when Southern white women be ready to stop lynching, it will be stopped and not before" (quoted by Hall, 1983, p. 338). Declaring the crime not only an injustice to blacks, but also an insult to white women, the group proclaimed that "lynching, far from offering a shield against sexual assault, served as a weapon of both racial and sexual terror, planting fear in women's minds and dependency in their hearts" (Hall, 1983, p. 339). Instead of supporting the tyranny brought about by their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons, these women traced the origins of mob violence to its roots in white supremacy. They organized themselves so they could return to their communities and argue against the paternalistic ideas that had been making it possible to carry on vigilante justice in their names (Hall 1983).

Many daily newspapers supported the Association, praising and encouraging the work of the women in their editorial pages. After 1936, there were few dailies that did not condemn lynchings, regardless of the alleged crime of the victim. Even so, the press often supported the mob violence in its news columns. According to Ames (1942), "This contradiction in policy in the news columns equalized, if it did not actually nullify, the effect of the editorial column ... Probably no other public-opinion-forming agency has done more to change the public's attitude toward lynchings than has the Southern press" (p. 15). In the later years, few lynchings made the front page, and even fewer were awarded banner headlines.

The civil rights movement took front stage in the mid-to-late-1950s, and the mainstream press became more aware of how it wrote about blacks. This newfound awareness made a difference in the media's choice of rape stories. Though still professing a strong preference for stories featuring blacks accused of raping whites, the press now printed articles emphasizing false accusations and miscarriages of justice. As the civil rights movement grew in the 1960s, the press' sensitivity to race continued to increase. Though it now proudly printed stories about justice gone wrong due to racism, the media began to place the blame for rape on the victim (Benedict, 1992).

As a second wave of feminism exploded in the 1970s, rape crisis centers opened and feminist consciousness-raising groups heightened awareness of sex crimes. Rape coverage began to expand and shift its focus. Articles discussed the crime victim and printed stories about the aftereffects of the crime (Benedict, 1992). Between 1972 and 1974, as feminists in New York pushed for legal reform, the number of stories running about rape in *The New York Times* increased more than 250% (Byerly, 1995). In 1979, Stephanie Mansfeld, a reporter for *The Washington Post*, was one of the first journalists to use the terms acquaintance rape and date rape (Reeves Sanday, 1996).

Magazine coverage of the crime also began to mirror the new awareness. A study of magazine portrayals of rape found few articles on the subject between 1900 and 1956. Over the next 25 years however, coverage expanded with the number of articles dealing with rape taking a dramatic swing upward in the 1970s. Coverage style also changed. Articles printed before 1970 focused on the suspect, while post-1970 articles focused on

the victim or on rape as a societal problem (Gordon & Riger, 1989). Popular magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Mademoiselle* and *Esquire* also increased their coverage in these years.

Historically, news frames have underrepresented and misrepresented women. “Women are made invisible, along with all our differences, our difficulties and our points of view” (Flanders, 1997, p. 56). As late as the late 1970s, world news routinely ignored women’s accomplishments and problems. Even as the women’s movement opened new doors, news coverage continually downplayed women’s gains. Research has shown that there has been little improvement in quantity or quality of news about women (Byerly, 1995). In 1990, in response to a critical study of his paper, the executive director of *The New York Times* told critics, in effect, that when women were making the news they would be in it (Flanders, 1997). One year later, another study concluded that news stories about women and their problems are rare, but when reported on, the picture is usually sexual or confined to the home (Byerly, 1995).

Still today, this problem is compounded by the lack of women in the newsroom. From the earliest writings of pioneer women, females have told of their struggle to be accepted in the newsroom. The first year the census lists full time journalists by sex was 1870. In that year, 35 of the 5,286 reporters were women—most of them society recorders. Even by the 1970s, the numbers were still four to one and most of the women were entry-level reporters. The numbers have increased, but women still do not make up half the newspaper workforce. A 1992 survey found that 33.9% of workers involved in

daily newspaper journalism were women. According to the American Association of Newspaper Editors, in 1998, women ran 13 of the 103 daily newspapers with circulation exceeding 100,000. Two other women were heading large newspaper groups in California. At this time, only two women even ranked among leaders of the nation's 20 largest papers.

Still today, feminist opinions, attitudes and data are nowhere to be found in stories about issues feminists have researched, analyzed and studied—topics on which they are experts. During the first six months of 1995, men wrote 93% of all the columns on the op-ed page of *The New York Times* after the only female columnist stepped down and it took over six months to replace her (Flanders, 1997). That same year, *Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt wrote a column decrying the absence of African Americans in the press. “I could have written almost the same article about the issue of gender,” she later told the Congress (quoted by Flanders, 1997, p. 202). According to a study conducted for The Freedom Forum’s Free Press/Fair Press project titled *Who Speaks For America? Sex, Age and Race on the Network News*, when the three main broadcast networks—ABC, CBS and NBC—give experts the opportunity to speak on their early evening newscasts, the speakers are almost exclusively white and male. During the first six months of 1998, nearly nine of 10 “expert” sound bites on the network newscasts were provided by men, and more than nine in 10 were provided by whites. Women accounted for just 13% of expert sound bites (“Network News Expert,” 1998).

As stated earlier, the media shape our opinions on topics about which we are ignorant. For the majority of individuals, knowledge about crime and the administration of justice comes from the news media, not direct exposure to law enforcement. Crime news, like all other news, is framed. "The reader of crime news is provided with crime stories given as fact but, in reality, what they read are designed realities" (Sherizen, 1978, p. 206).

According to Meyers (1997), traditional examinations of crime coverage by media scholars have failed to study violence directed specifically at women by men. In our patriarchal society there is a gendered hierarchy with men at the top, and male domination and female subordination are considered both desirable and normal. The gender roles that define male and female behavior are not biological, but social constraints that are so ingrained in our society that people see them as innate characteristics.

The news draws on these traditional notions of appropriate gender roles when writing about violence against women. "Coverage of violence against women reflects the myths, stereotypes, and assumptions rooted in patriarchal ideology. The coverage places anti-woman violence within the context of individual pathology rather than attributing it to social structures and socially approved gender roles" (Meyers, 1997, p. 41). By presenting these stories of violence against women as separate, discrete incidents, the news reinforces that idea that this violence is a matter of isolated deviance related only to the particular circumstances of those involved, which ignores its connection to the larger structure of patriarchy, domination and control. Denying the social roots of anti-woman

violence, this mirage relieves society of any obligation to end male on female violence. Instead of making the connection, media theorists have traditionally ignored such crimes.

Patriarchy does not work independently of race and class. Directly related to all power structures in society, rape reflects the interconnectedness of the race, gender and class oppressions that characterize our world. These forms of oppression work together to support, maintain, and reproduce the dominant patriarchal ideology. It is naïve to assume that a rich white woman who is attacked in her affluent neighborhood will be treated the same by the media as a poor black woman who has been victimized at a poorly lit subway stop on the “wrong side of the tracks.” Those types of things simply don’t happen to good people in good neighborhoods, but they can be expected to occur when you are dealing with “those kinds of people.”

Everyday, in every city, crimes occur. Each day though, only a small handful of the stories are reported. “Media are mobile stoplights, not passive mirrors of the society; selectivity is the instrument of their action” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 49). Determining what is news is a highly subjective process. Obviously, not all crime can be reported, but the crimes that are chosen for coverage are given legitimacy. These are likely to become the issues that consumers believe are important.

Crime coverage is driven by research that shows viewers respond to crime with far greater interest than other stories. Some crimes receive much more coverage than others. Violent crime makes up about 70% of crime news (Katz, 1987). Sherizen (1978) found that whereas almost 70% of all murders were reported in Chicago, only 5% of rapes and



less than 1% of almost all other crimes became news. He noted that the rule for coverage was

The more prevalent the crime, the less it would be reported, with the exception of murder/manslaughter. ... The only other crimes that appeared more frequently than expected were those which were (or could be written as) humorous, ironic, and/or unusual or in which the situation was sentimental or dramatic, especially in terms of the participants. (p. 215)

Increasing economic pressures continually threaten quality of U.S. journalism.

Joseph Dominick (1978) believes that competition is most likely one reason for the emphasis on crime news in newspapers. As newspapers struggle to keep an audience during today's electronic media craze, news stories are more graphic and shocking. Many media scholars believe that *The New York Times'* unflattering profile of Patricia Bowman was written to appeal to yuppie readers—an affluent group used to a light, gossipy style of journalism—a demographic group the paper had been struggling to attain (Lacayo, 6 May 1991).

Another example of the connection between crime news and competition was visible in Chicago in 1983 when Rupert Murdoch bought the *Chicago Sun-Times*. In order to sell more papers, media observers predicted that the newspaper would begin to feature more crime, and feature it more sensationally. To compete, the city's premier newspaper, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Sun-Times* would also have to print more crime stories—and treat them more sensationally. A content analysis study of the newspapers

one year before the *Sun-Times* was sold and for two months following the Murdoch takeover supported the predictions. For both papers, there was a sharp increase in violent crime coverage, including rape (Gordon & Riger, 1989).

The pressure for profits has led to the proliferation of market-driven news products including short stories lacking details and “infotainment” pieces. This is especially true for coverage of rape. There is a tendency in the media to always look for exciting and unique stories. Therefore, the media rarely cover typical rapes, choosing instead to sensationalize unusual or especially gory cases—cases which draw a large audience and, in turn, sell advertising dollars. “In deciding which rapes are newsworthy, newspapers distort their presentation, avoiding the representative rape in favor of the most lurid, in order to capture their readers’ attention” (Gordon & Riger, 1989, p. 69). This can have devastating consequences for women. Articles designed to provoke and titillate readers trivialize this violent crime and support the dangerous myth that rape is sexy and that women secretly enjoyed being taken by force (“Sex Offenses,” 1991).

As newspapers play an important role in shaping the public’s beliefs about a crime, and in an individual’s assessment of her own risks, the rape scenarios portrayed by the media often intensify the fears of women. For example, a study that compared newspaper stories on rape to data in Uniform Crime Reports and Victimization Surveys found major differences between the news stories and police reports. Women actually escaped in 25% of reported statistics, while in newspaper stories, fewer than one in 10 victims escaped (Gordon & Heath, 1981). Instead of focusing on underlying trends,

which would make it possible for women to accurately gauge their own safety, the cases newspapers cover are so unusual that fears of women are misdirected and unfounded.

Lack of detail in rape stories also profoundly affects a woman's perception of the crime. Rape stories have been found to have fewer details than do articles about murder or assault, which could result in more public confusion about rape (Meyers, 1997; Heath, Gordon & LeBailly, 1981). Consumers are often left uninformed about the relationship between the rapist and victim and the occupation, age, race, condition of the victim, use of a weapon and exact location of the crime (Heath, Gordon & LeBailly, 1981; Lemert, 1989). When readers fail to receive detail about a rape, they tend to fill in the questions with their own details, which unfortunately, are typically inaccurate stereotypes (Heath, Gordon & LeBailly, 1981).

These stereotypes live on because journalists frequently depend on familiar story lines or themes in order to produce entertaining, compelling stories. For rape stories, the themes are based on commonly held perceptions or myths about the crime, which are stated as facts. Many of these reflect attitudes, beliefs and mistaken ideas that have been with us for centuries. Rape myths arise and are perpetuated by socialization processes that specify sex-role behaviors and attitudes towards women. These "mental clichés" make reporting the crime easier for journalists because the foundation of the story is already set. The reporter simply adds the correct details to make the story fit neatly into the mold. Extremely common in our society, these fallacies create a climate hostile to rape victims, painting them as willing participants in their victimization or even as

instigators of the crime. The myths reported normalize male supremacy and sexual violence, making these qualities seem so natural that they are thought of as “just the way things are.”

## CHAPTER 4

### LITERATURE REVIEW. PART THREE

#### The Name Debate

To name or not to name? A National Victim Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center study has urged a legal ban on publishing the names and addresses of woman who report being raped. Eighty-six percent of more than 4,000 woman interviewed for the study told crime-victim advocates that “victims would be less likely to report rapes if they felt their names would be disclosed by the news media” (quoted by Ticker, 1994, p. 48). A 1991 survey for the Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press discovered that 70% of those interviewed disapproved of publishing or airing an alleged victim's name. Indeed, many interviewees expressed sentiment that the release of a victim's name was simply a commercially motivated decision (Gersh, 1991).

Some journalists feel that the media is actually harming rape victims by not reporting their names to the public. Most argue that by publishing the name of a sexual assault victim, the media will help remove the social stigma of the crime. *Newsweek* writer David Kaplan (16 Dec. 1991) believes that “the paternalism of not naming names reinforces the idea that rape is anything more than a terrible act of violence, that women should be shamed” (p. 26). But to say that rape is just like any other crime, and therefore its victims should be treated in the same way, is to say that Americans do not carry a heavy load of negative stereotypes about this crime. It is difficult to say that rape is

treated like any other crime in the media because

There is no other crime in which the character, behavior and past of the complainant are seen as central elements in determining whether a crime has occurred. There are lots of crimes that could not take place without carelessness, naivete, ignorance or bad judgment on the part of the victims: mail fraud ('Make \$100,000 at home in your spare time!'), confidence games and many violent crimes as well. But when my father was burglarized after forgetting to lock the cellar door, the police did not tell him he had been asking for it. (Pollitt, 1991, p. 850)

Rape differs from other crimes because many people believe that women want to be forced into sex, and that by dressing in a certain way, or by drinking alcohol, they give up the right to say no. University of Illinois at Chicago sociologist Pauline Bart says people believe male sexuality "is like a locomotive going downhill with the throttle out—it can only be stopped by a female orifice" (Salholz, et al., 16 Dec. 1991, p. 23). Even today, many people still believe men can not be expected to control themselves and that they are entitled to take by force what a woman will not give through persuasion. A 1991 telephone poll found that 53% of adults over age 50, and 31% of adults between ages 35 and 40 still believe a woman is to blame for her rape if she dresses provocatively (Benedict, 1993). Pollitt discusses the stereotypes surrounding rape in a 1991 article about the Smith rape case.

My files bulge with stories that show how widespread these beliefs are: the Wisconsin judge who put a child molester on probation because he felt the 3-year-old female victim had acted provocatively; the Florida jury that exonerated a rapist because his victim was wearing disco attire; and so on. (p. 850)

Even if the stereotypes were not so damning for a victim, there are also some things people often feel are not anyone's business but their own. Rape victims may not want their mothers, children, or even the rapist or other sexual predators, to know their name or where they live. This should be their prerogative, not something that is decided by an editor at a newspaper.

Another argument states that naming the victim will "level the playing field" with the defendants. NBC News President Michael Gartner, along with several criminal defense attorneys and civil libertarians, argued that the press was wrong when it withheld the Central Park jogger's identity, but broadly publicized the names of the defendants. Gartner says, "As wounding and revealing as her name may be, it's news. Specifics add credibility to the story. We're a club that knows the name and we're telling public they don't" (quoted by Kaplan & Leonard, 2 April 1990, p. 48). During the trial, Robert Burns, an attorney for one of the boys, declared, "The press is inconsistent. They protect the wishes of the jogger, because of all she's been through. But they don't care at all about the consequences for my client, who's been branded a gang-raper for a year now" (quoted by Kaplan & Leonard, 2 April 1990, p. 48).

Others say the right of the accused and accuser can not be compared. Jerry Nachman, editor of the *New York Post*, believes that, "People who are arrested have no entitlement to privacy" (quoted by Kaplan & Leonard, 2 April 1990, p. 48). During the Smith case, Gartner's news station did air the name of the victim. According to Gartner, NBC news named the woman because "who she is is material. You try to give viewers as many facts and you can and let them make up their minds" (quoted by Pollitt, 1991, p. 847). But by shifting the debate about rape coverage to the question of merely naming names, the media preempt a discussion about the way it reports crimes that contain a sexual component. That said, the court interpretation has made it clear that media does have the right to choose if a sexual assault victim's name will appear in print, and it is unrealistic to say that this privilege will not be used.



## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH DESIGN

Given the discussion of the values and objectives of the media, it is not surprising that many rape stories end up being covered as courtroom drama. Offering vivid conflicts between opposing sides, trials fit the criteria for popular news coverage. In an attempt to gain readership, reporters highlight the tension of a case through dramatic narrative, yet they “almost always retreat from opportunities to explain the power structures and political processes that lie behind issues” (Bennett, 1988, p. 23). The focus on personal issues has implicitly reinforced traditional notions about rape; individuals, rather than systems of law, gender, race or class, become responsible for the crimes under consideration (Benedict, 1992).

This research assumes a primarily qualitative approach to analyzing *The New York Times* coverage of two rape cases. The study looks at how the victims in these two cases were treated by *The New York Times* by analyzing the content of the selected articles. Based on this information, this study will give a critical discussion elaborating on misrepresentations in the frames present in *The New York Times* coverage.

#### Research Questions

The study attempts to answer and discuss five questions: (a) Did articles published in *The New York Times* about the Central Park jogger case and the Smith case contain sexist descriptive words? (b) Are rape myths evident in the selected rape stories?

(c) Did female reporters cover the two rape cases, and if so, did their coverage differ from male reporters' stories in terms of using descriptive words and rape myths? (d) Is Benedict (1992) correct in concluding that a victim of rape will be treated as either a virgin or a vamp? (e) Is media coverage responsible enough to warrant openly naming rape victims without their consent?

### Methodology

Using qualitative analysis, this study analyzes *The New York Times* frame for the Central Park jogger rape case and the Smith rape case. The frame perspective was chosen because of the complexity of the social implications of the crime. The social silence surrounding rape makes the media frame the primary, if not only, frame of reference for most people. The rape frame implies myths and stereotypes, leaving readers with an inaccurate representation of the crime. Using frame analysis the researcher can study the underlying meaning in news articles by identifying which facts are included or omitted, who is used as a source and how information is organized. Frame analysis also allows the researcher to evaluate the power of reporters to "promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

By analyzing article content, this research explores the frame presented by *The New York Times* for each of these trials. Stacks and Hocking (1992) describe content analysis as "a research method or measurement technique that involves the systematic study of the content of communication messages" (p. 250). This unobtrusive method

allows the researcher to examine the structure and content of messages without laboratory research. Content analysis can focus on different types of content. According to Babbie (1998), message content can be classified in two ways. Manifest content is the obvious content or the “visible, surface content of a communication” (p. 312). Manifest content includes words and lyrics. It can be objectively identified and analyzed. The second type of classification is latent content. Latent content refers to the underlying meaning of the communication. Using an electronic analysis, this study will explore these two types of content in an attempt to understand the meaning inferred by the journalists writing *The New York Times* articles about these two rape cases.

The study begins by electronically searching for specific word choices. The next step involves analyzing the latent content of the articles, looking for evidence of rape myths. The study then looks at the authorship of each article and analyzes differences in female and male use of descriptive words and rape myths. The study finalizes by generating evidence in support of Benedict’s (1992) virgin or vamp theory. The analysis will develop into a discussion on the frame of these two rape cases in *The New York Times* coverage in order to decide if media coverage is responsible to warrant naming rape victims without their consent.

#### Validity and Reliability

This qualitative study is not generalizable to the entire population of rape stories, because it uses values as a research tool. Value-based analysis is a strength of this design because it allows the researcher to look at rape victims as people, and to study the myths

and stereotypes that surround this crime and haunt its survivors. The qualitative research design also shows that it is because of individual choice that this type of story is being written and printed, and that individual writers can make a choice to discontinue this practice.

Though it should be noted that this study lacks traditional structure, the author feels this unstructured method is appropriate for this type of study because it allows the researcher to look at both the words used, and most importantly, the meanings behind the words, and derive structure from them. The study will also be limited in reliability because statistical stability and reproducible results are necessary components of reliable research and these two facets of reliability can be difficult to achieve using content analysis (Babbie, 1998). Inter-coder reliability is difficult to attain in non-empirical research, and although semantic validity is present, each coder will bring with him or her his or her own sets of assumptions about the research which will cloud his or her interpretations of the research. Therefore, there are limits on the reproducibility of the study.

### Content Sample

The content sample analyzed for this study provides a comprehensive analysis of *The New York Times* coverage of the Central Park jogger rape case and the Smith rape case. The study was limited to coverage by *The New York Times* for several reasons. First, *The Times* was chosen because of its stature as a nationally important newspaper that has influence over the content of newspapers and other media. Secondly, it was the

only major newspaper to break the unwritten rule and name Smith's accuser, even though it had not named the woman raped in Central Park only a short time earlier. Finally, *The Times* refers to itself as a newspaper of record that is both an important source of current news and analysis, as well as a chronicle of those events that are important in American and world affairs.

*The Times* articles analyzed for this study were obtained through LEXIS-NEXIS, a reputable electronic commercial database provided by Mead Data Central. The articles were retrieved using LEXIS-NEXIS reQUESTer, a Web-based tool designed to conduct searches of major regional and national papers.

The analysis of the Central Park jogger case focuses on articles published in *The New York Times* from April 19, 1989, when the crime was committed to March 21, 1991, one week after a plea bargain agreement was reached for the last of the six defendants charged in the case. Using an "All News" search form, all of *The New York Times* articles that contained each of the following words: Central Park; jogger; and rape were located. This search presented 230 articles in which all three terms appeared. The search found news summaries, editorials, metro datelines and any articles relating to or mentioning the Central Park jogger rape. Articles of every length were located and included in the study. Of the vast amount of information found during this time period, 148 stories actually focused on the Central Park rape case. These are the articles that were analyzed for this study.

*The Times* coverage of the Smith case was analyzed between the dates of March 30, 1991 when the incident occurred and December 28, 1991, one week after a jury pronounced Smith not guilty. A second "All News" search of *The New York Times* found all instances in which the word "rape" was accompanied by either the word(s) "Smith" or "Bowman" or "Palm Beach." This search discovered 242 articles, which were overwhelmingly delivered from the national desk, but which also included news summaries, editorials and metro datelines. A total of 135 of the stories found actually focused on the Smith rape case. These are the articles that were analyzed for this study.

## CHAPTER 6

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Rape cases became news when the press began to print detailed descriptions of black lynchings. The coverage of these lynchings fueled the white man's ideology of the times—an ideology that oppressed women and black men. Feeding from its divisive beginning, rape coverage has continued to promote racial and sexual bias. Almost all the rape cases covered by reporters fit neatly into one of two predefined frames. The crux of the first rape frame lies in the idea that a woman, by her looks, actions or lack of morality, drove the man to attack her. Unable to control his lust, the rapist decided to “take” what was being “offered” to him. This is the frame most commonly used for date or acquaintance rape stories. If it is impossible to paint this scenario, the second frame reporters rely on showcases a pure and innocent victim attacked by a crazy beast whose animalistic behavior pre-empted all reason. In this picture, the rapist is almost always a man with darker skin than his victim. These assumptions guide reporters to frame the crime of rape using racist, classist and sexist tones and assist the press in perpetuating erroneous myths about the crime.

This analysis of the Central Park jogger and Smith rape cases attempts to reveal the differing frames presented by *The New York Times* for these two crimes. The purpose of this research is to show how race, class and gender affect the coverage of rape by the press. The research incorporates both a systematic and qualitative approach. First, the

researcher completed an electronic key word search of news articles from *The New York Times* concerning these two rape cases. Then in an effort to find evidence of rape myths, the researcher analyzed the latent content of each of the articles. After analyzing the difference in reporting by male and female reporters, the study progressed to a discussion on the issue of naming rape victims in the press.

The articles compiled from *The New York Times* for this study were analyzed in an attempt to address each of the five research questions outlined in the previous chapter. Each question was dealt with individually with the results presented first followed by a discussion of the issues raised by the data.

Of the 148 articles about the Central Park jogger attack that appeared in *The New York Times* and were analyzed for this study, 128 or over 86% focused on the aftermath following the attack and the first trial where three defendants were found guilty of raping and beating the jogger. Another 26 articles centered on the second trial where two youths were found guilty of sexual abuse and assault of the jogger, and only two articles discussed the plea bargain and sentencing of the final defendant.

Within the analyzed articles, several different angles of the story were presented. Readers learned the differing versions of the events of the evening of April 19, 1989. The specifics of the rape and beating of the jogger were discussed, as were facts about the ensuing investigation. The home lives of the suspects were analyzed. The LEXIS-NEXIS database also located articles reporting on the legal aspects of the trial and



sentencing of the defendants. Several articles published detailed descriptions of the injuries suffered by the Central Park jogger and featured news about her recovery.

The 135 articles analyzed in the Smith rape case focused on several different angles, but the most prominent was the fact that the accused was a Kennedy relation. Early in the investigation, discussions on preferential treatment from the police, the impact the allegation might have on Senator Kennedy's career, even the cleanliness of the Mediterranean-style Kennedy estate garnered attention. Questions about the absence of an arrest were noted and access to police information was discussed. The media circus that had happened upon Palm Beach was mentioned several times, and, of course, the name debate once again was a hot topic, especially since media that chose to "out" the victim without her consent were violating a Florida law that prohibited disclosure of a rape victim's name.

Even though the story took on a life of its own, none of the articles analyzed about the Smith case questioned the preponderance of coverage this case received. This was not true for the Central Park jogger case where several stories catechized why the media was paying so much attention to this rape when crimes committed against blacks and lower class individuals were virtually ignored. Many in the East Harlem neighborhood that was home to the suspects voiced concern about the daily violence that occurred in their backyard. A mother of three pointed to a wanted poster seeking a young man who recently raped several girls between the ages of 13 and 15 in the neighborhood

housing projects. She told the reporter that no one in the city was outraged about the rapes of these children (Chira, 1 May 1989).

In the same week that the jogger was raped, there were 28 other rapes reported across New York City. These rapes gained little if any attention from the media, and therefore, from the public. According to Don Terry's article *In a Week of an Infamous Rape, 28 Other Victims Suffer* (29 May 1989), nearly all of the 28 other women who were raped were black or Hispanic. Their ages ranged from 8-51. Almost all the rapes committed that week were by attackers who were of the same race as the victim. The attacks included a gang rape of a 12-year-old girl by four boys, ages 11, 12, 13 and 15. As the Central Park jogger case exemplifies, this horrific rape would have been classified as newsworthy if it had been a white girl attacked by a group of young black boys. But black on black crime is low priority with the media and the press chose to ignore this crime simply because the victim and her attackers were of a minority race. Many were also outraged when, several days after the Central Park rape, a 39-year-old woman was raped and sodomized by three armed men when she went to the top of a 21-story building in Harlem to watch a sunrise. After robbing her of her cash and jewelry, the men hurled the struggling woman into a 50-foot air shaft. Her fall, partially broken by clotheslines, shattered her pelvis and broke both of her legs and ankles. She also suffered extensive internal injuries. The woman and her attackers were black. The story received scant attention from the media.

So why did the Central Park jogger and the Smith rape cases receive such an extraordinary amount of attention from the media? One reason—they sold newspapers. In a day when they have to compete with cable television, the Internet and even video games for attention, newspapers need to provide readers with a reason to walk to the newsstand each morning. Catering to readers who prefer to receive information in short, rousing bursts, newspapers focus their attention on reporting stories that are exciting and unique. For rape cases, this means that the typical rape, the kind that account for 80% of the attacks that occur in our country, are just too dull to warrant coverage. The violence and celebrity aspects of the two cases analyzed provided the perfect backdrop for reporters looking to write lurid tales of race, sex and scandal.

For the Central Park jogger, outrage over the crime also played a role in coverage. Writers for *The Times* are predominantly white, affluent and male, and this case made them stop and suck in their breath. Who among them hadn't crossed to the other side of the street because they felt threatened when a gang of black "punks" started walking towards them? For reporters, it was difficult to forget that it could have been their sister, daughter or their wife out there that night. In fear of "the other," the press protectively took the jogger under their wing because she was one of "them."

There was unanimous agreement that the Smith case received so much attention because Smith was a Kennedy relation. To combat any negative imagery that might have been connoted from the philandering Kennedy reputation, a May 11, 1991 profile made sure to point out that "Willy Smith was an un-Kennedy: different, quiet, a little aloof"

(Barringer, section 1, p. 6). According to his fraternity friends, Smith “was completely low key” about being a Kennedy relation. Although the article had been written in an effort to “level the playing field” after publishing an extremely damaging profile of Bowman on April 17, 1991, in actuality, it was almost an enshrinement of Smith.

As for the Florida incident, it was noted, “They bear little resemblance to each other, the William K. Smith charged as a rapist in Palm Beach and the William K. Smith described by friends, fellow medical students, relatives and teachers who knew him before.” The Smith they discovered was “a good, reliable guy,” a man who offered “a mixture of charm, reserve and, according to one cousin, sardonic humor.” His friends were doctoral students and college professors who “remember him as a good listener and a thoughtful conversationalist. He “seldom had more than a glass of wine or a mug of beer” because he “hated to lose control.” Others predicated, “The idea of Willy hurting somebody, violating somebody—he wouldn't do that. He wouldn't hurt somebody. He just wouldn't.” A man of considerable social class, Smith spent several months working for an investment banking firm, but decided to move on because “he found financial work unsatisfying.” Instead, his admirers were “favorably impressed by Willy Smith's desire to take on a grueling medical career and to work in the areas of greatest need, like Indian reservations and inner-city hospitals.” Even his eulogy at his father's funeral was memorable. “Willy's reminiscences, mixing humor and affection, left many present feeling he had outperformed his elders.” These elders included Senator Ted Kennedy and

historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. In their rush to adopt him, these reporters declared Smith, a man accused of this heinous crime, the perfect “son” (Barringer, section 1, p. 6).

And the victim—she was almost their worst nightmare. What kind of woman stays out in a bar all night and then goes home with a virtual stranger when she has a young daughter waiting at home? What kind of woman has several abortions and still gets knocked up by a boyfriend she has no intention of marrying? What kind of woman drives fast cars and quits college and depends on her wealthy stepfather to buy her a house? The kind of woman you don’t want your son to bring home. The kind of woman who lies to get her way. The kind of woman who falsely accuses someone of rape for attention and money. In this case, the press had to choose between the victim and the accused and they went with one of their own.

In several of the articles discussing the Central Park jogger case, reporters tried to find reasons for the attack, interviewing experts and common folk to hear their explanations. In an article titled *Grim Seeds of Park Rampage Found in East Harlem Streets*, everything from neighborhood violence to affluence envy, to rap music, to drugs, to boredom to broken families is mentioned as a possible reason for the attack (Kolata, 2 May 1989). Two separate friends of the defendants guessed that peer pressure must have been the reason these youths attacked the jogger. (Kaufman, 26 April 1989). The lack of a death penalty in New York was also addressed as a possible reason for the rape. Donald Trump took out ads in newspapers across the city titled *Bring Back the Death Penalty. Bring Back Our Police!* In the ad copy, Trump berated Mayor Edward Koch

stating that Koch “has stated that hate and rancor should be removed from our hearts.” He wrote, “I want to hate these muggers and murderers. They should be forced to suffer and, when they kill, they should be executed for their crimes” (Foderaro, 1 May 1989, p. B6). And, of course, television viewing was also mentioned as a cause for the violence (Goodman, 2 May 1989).

In the Smith case, there were not any articles specifically written to explain why the rape occurred. Instead of researching date rape and violence against women, the press turned to the defense team for an explanation of the event. Four times the defendant’s lawyers were noted for mentioning the victim’s “desire for revenge” (Rohter, 10 Aug. 1991, section 1, p. 6) or her “tendency to seek revenge against those who anger her” (“Smith Asserts Woman Consented,” 6 Nov. 1991, p. A20). Only once was the prosecutor, Moira Lasch, quoted on this issue. “The woman, Mrs. Lasch said, had ‘no ulterior motive’ for bringing rape charges against Mr. Smith. ‘Her only motive was her own belief in our system of justice,’ Mrs. Lasch said. ‘She did not report this crime for money or publicity’” (Margolick, 3 Dec. 1991, p. A18). The victim’s stepfather also told a reporter, “This is not about money. This is about justice” (as quoted by Butterfield, 17 April 1991, p. A17).

None of the news articles focused on the real reason men rape women—misogyny. In our patriarchal society, women are devalued. While little boys grow up learning to be assertive, curious and independent, little girls are socialized to be quiet, demure, passive, and domestic, traits our society devalues. From the clothes they

wear to the rooms they sleep in to the toys and books they play with, children are socialized to accept these stereotypical and value-laden gender roles.

By looking for specific “reasons” for a rape, the press failed to note the underlying issues at play. Rape is a crime that occurs against women simply because they are women. It is an act of violent degradation designed to intimidate and inspire fear in women. Men do not rape women because they want to have sex. Men rape women because they need to control, dominate and humiliate someone. The youths who attacked the jogger did so because she was not “real” to them. She was faceless, a thing, an object to be conquered. They were using sexual violence to express their power. The press also failed when it attempted to use Bowman’s background as a “reason” for her rape. With its damaging and inaccurate reporting, *The Times* neglected to make it clear that rape is not a two-person crime. The victim did nothing wrong. She did not ask to be raped and her actions did not make her responsible for being raped.

In the Central Park jogger case, race played a prominent role in many of the articles. Interviews with blacks living in the same neighborhood as the teenagers charged with the rape focused on fears that the case would “ignite smoldering racial tensions among black and white New Yorkers” and “fuel a misconception that blacks, particularly young males, are to be subjects of fear and scorn” (Marriott, 24 April 1989, p. B3). Many questioned the attention given to the crime, wondering “if there would have been so much publicity if it had happened in Harlem,” pointing out that that “the issue is not purely one of race: It’s black on black too” (quoted by Marriott, 24 April 1989, p. B3).

“If it had been a black woman, you wouldn't have had all this. Our children are being raped and hurt, but nobody talks about it” (quoted by Chira, 1 May 1980, p. A1).

Others though, felt like “it's the same old story. The press is trying to make our youth out to be some kind of animals” (quoted by Marriott, 24 April 1989, p. B3). Race was not an issue in the Smith rape case.

The fact that the coverage of the Central Park jogger case played so perfectly into the stereotypical view of the black man as a wild beast attacking a pure, white woman cannot be ignored. Since the beginning of rape reporting, rape and race have been intricately intertwined. For many years, rapes were reported only in conjunction with lynchings, and these lynchings punctuated the hierarchical power relationships in our society. Used as a weapon of intimidation, lynchings worked to keep both blacks and white women in their subordinate positions. Though the Central Park jogger case was a statistical anomaly, reporters continued this tradition by making the white female seem helpless. Without a man to protect her, the woman was easily victimized. Made out to be beasts, the black man was dehumanized. And by not reporting on the other rapes, the press also failed black women, keeping them “invisible.”

The notion that the media seemed to have declared the Central Park jogger suspects guilty before the trial had even started was also discussed in editorials. Disappointed that the case seemed to have tried in the press before it got to court, newspaperman A.M. Rosenthal implored the press to stop playing judge, jury and executioner. “The press, print and electronic, also has decided those people in jail are



guilty and hardly bothers to hide it. Sprinkling an 'alleged' here and there does not change the tone." Drawing on the history of rape reporting, he declared the press coverage of the case a "verbal lynching" (5 May 1989, p. A35). When the first three defendants were found guilty, one of their lawyers declared the verdict "was a case of middle-class morality convicting the defendants even before they came to court" (Sullivan, 19 Aug. 1990, section 1, p. 1)

Smith's probable guilt was not a topic of discussion in *The New York Times*, probably because most reporters had decided early on that he was innocent. For this reason, Smith's right to a fair trial was an important topic. Smith's lawyers claimed that prejudicial statements from the Palm Beach Police Department and the State Attorney's office "had compromised their client's right to a fair trial" (Golden, 8 June 1991, section 1, p. 9) because "the prosecutor's office has generated massive pretrial publicity calculated to shore up its case and poison the minds of potential jurors" ("Press Seeks Full Access," 15 June 1991, section 1, p. 9). Smith's lawyers also fought to restrict news coverage of the trial, claiming their "client's right to a fair trial will be damaged unless news organizations are restricted before the scheduled Aug. 5 trial date" ("Press Seeks Full Access," 15 June 1991, section 1, p. 9). These statements were all recorded before the prosecutor released 76 pages of sworn accounts from three women who claimed that Smith had also assaulted them. Though this evidence was not admitted in court, it was well played in the media.

### Descriptive Words

This study electronically searched for evidence of Benedict's (1992) "words to watch" in *The New York Times* articles about the Central Park jogger case and the Smith case. These condescending and sexist terms are often used by the press to describe female crime victims, but are almost never used to describe men. Of the 24 words Benedict pinpoints, 17 of them were not used at all in any of the stories covering either case. These words were: vivacious, flirtatious, curvacious, blonde, bubbly, precocious, pert, prudish, naive, worldly, experienced, mature, full-figured, attractive, doll-like, divorcee and party-goer.

The Central Park jogger was described as a "girl" three times, two of which were in quotes from the defendants to police. The third time the woman was described as a girl was in a quote about her beauty by security employee at her place of work (Sullivan, 30 Nov. 1989). The woman in the Smith case was referred to as a girl nine times. In one story, the prosecutor in the case is described as "old-fashioned" because she referred to the victim and her friend as "you girls;" and later as "co-eds" (Margolick, 8 Dec. 1991, section 1, p.36). Patrick Kennedy is quoted twice as saying "the girl is not someone I know" (Butterfield, 8 April 1991, p. A8 & Suro, 15 May 1991, p. A23). When allegations of other attacks by Smith came to light, the victims are also described as girls. After the trial, *The New York Times* chose to quote Pat Birmingham, who runs a beauty pageant called "Miss Tourism of the Americas," as a local source for an article about how those living in Palm Beach viewed the case. Birmingham told a reporter, "The girl has my

sympathy. I don't know what her problems are, but I wish her well" (Rohter, 13 Dec. 1991, p. A26). Persistently feeding frenzy that surrounds rape myths, *The Times* also quoted a juror as saying, "one gal was wondering why a girl would go out at 3 in the morning with a guy she didn't know" (Margolick, 1 Nov. 1991, p. A14).

The word "pretty" is used only one time in the Central Park jogger stories, and this was to describe the "group" of people the jogger belonged too, not the jogger personally. "Their presence in the courtroom seemed to announce what it was about this case that gripped people from the start. They were handsome and pretty and educated and white" (Glaberson, 23 July 1990, p. B1). In the Smith case, pretty was also only used one time, though not to describe the victim. This time, the word was used by a 78-year-old grandmother who told the prosecutor to "smile" so she would "look pretty" (Margolick, 8 Dec. 1991, section 1, p. 36). This quote accompanied an article about the prosecutor's cool demeanor and negative attitude. One of several articles that mentioned the prosecutor's difficulty in connecting to the "audience," this article gave the impression that that the only type of people who believed in the victim and her story were those who are unhappy and socially inept in their own lives.

The word "wild" was not used in connection with the jogger, though the defendants were typed as wild animals on numerous occasions. The word "wilding" was also used to describe the actions of the youths in the attack. It is believed this word originated when a police interviewer misunderstood a reference to the popular rap song "Wild Thing."

An outpouring of outrage followed when the word wild was used to describe the victim in the Smith case. Quoting an anonymous source, *Times* reporter Fox Butterfield noted that the victim had “a little wild streak” in his April 16, 1991. In this same story, another anonymous source said “this wildness you have heard about, it wasn't the same kind of wildness as other people” (p. A17). Her “wild streak” was mentioned six separate times in the analyzed articles.

The defendant in the Smith case referred to the victim as “hysterical” four times. “Fearing pregnancy and venereal disease, he said, and believing Mr. Smith to be ‘cold and indifferent,’ she became hysterical, and accused the man she called ‘Michael’ of rape” (Margolick, 3 Dec. 1991, p. A18). Smith is also noted as saying that at other times the woman was “erratic, hysterical and irrational” (Margolick, 11 Dec. 1991, p. A1). According to the friend who came to pick up the victim at the Kennedy estate that morning, she was “hysterical” and “very shook up” immediately after the incident (Margolick, 4 Dec. 1991, p. A20). Another friend said that “in response to the woman’s hysteria” he removed a large urn from the Kennedy estate so the police would believe the woman had been at the Kennedy home (Barringer, 16 May 1991, p. A19). The Central Park jogger was never called hysterical.

The prosecutor in the Central Park jogger case was quoted using the word “stripped” two times. The first time was at the arraignment of the defendants. “The teen-agers described how they hunted the woman, chased her down a path, beat her with a lead pipe, a brick and rocks, stripped her clothes and then held her down while at least

four of them raped her” (McKinley, 24 April 1989, p. B1). And the second occurrence was during the sentencing when she described how the first three defendants “brutally beat and raped her, and then left her to die naked and stripped in the dark and empty woods” (Sullivan, 12 Sept. 1990, p. B1). These were the only times stripped was used in any of the Central Park jogger or Smith articles.

In both cases, a derivative of “had sex” was used to describe the rape. During the Central Park jogger trial, a witness who was a friend of one of the defendants was quoted as saying, “I don't believe what I've been hearing about you, that you had sex with that woman” (Sullivan, 8 Nov. 1990, p. B17). The witness later said that the defendant had told her at least three times that he did not have sex with the jogger. During the trial it was also reported that two detectives asked one of the defendants if he “had had sex with the victim” (Sullivan, 21 July 1990, section 1, p. 25). Detectives also asked another defendant if he “assisted holding the jogger down while others had sex with her” (Sullivan, 2 Aug. 1990, p. B1). One defendant was quoted from a police report as saying another defendant “pulled down his pants and had sex with her” (Sullivan, 18 July 1990. p. B3). In these occurrences, it is much more likely that the defendants used other “colorful” words to describe their behavior and that the police substituted these obscenities with “had sex.” According to jury comments after the trial, the jury “had trouble with the legal question of whether the defendants had acted in concert, on the theory that they may not have had sexual intercourse with the jogger, but aided and abetted those who did”

(Barron, 19 Aug. 1990, section 1, p. 33). Even in a case where the crime is so stereotypical, people still refer to the rape as sexual intercourse.

The words "sexual intercourse" were used seven times in the Smith trial, while the words "sexual relations" were used six times. One of the times sexual intercourse was used was in the early stages of the investigation. Officials stated that "tests established that the woman had had sexual intercourse, but they neither confirm nor eliminate Mr. Smith as her partner" ("Rape Inquiry," 2 May 1991, p. A23). The word "partner" describes a relationship in which something is shared. In choosing this word, the police made it sound like the rape was a two person event. The woman had been raped; therefore she had no partner. Another time, police said "genetic tests that could determine whether Mr. Smith had had sex with the woman" (Golden, 8 May 1991, p. A18). *The New York Times* also noted several times that Smith acknowledged, or did not deny that he had sex with the woman.

Three of the defendants in the Central Park jogger case are said to have told officers that they had "fondled" the woman during the attack. More likely, they told police they grabbed or touched the woman, as fondled is not a word that regularly appears in the everyday vocabulary of most teenage boys, and police substituted fondled when writing their reports. These three instances are the only time fondled appeared in the Central Park stories. In the Smith case, the word was not used to describe the attack on the Palm Beach victim, but when allegations of sexual assault from three other women

were publicized, Smith was said to "have tackled and fondled one of the women" (Rohter, 23 July 1991, p. A14).

Reporters undoubtedly have feelings about the stories they are reporting, but it is important that the words they choose do not force their opinions onto their readers. Although words may be similar, their connotations are quite different and even a minor word change can change the meaning of a story. For example, if you label a dog a pet, a carnivore or a vertebrate, it will be treated in a different sense. As word choice is so important, it was alarming to find examples of the noted descriptive words in the analyzed articles, especially since many of them were used by officials who should have been well versed in the language of rape.

Though they may seem trivial, words serve as the symbols we use to communicate. These symbols have meanings that define, describe and evaluate us. For our society, the power behind words lies in the idea that they have shared meanings and valuations. Given that women are denigrated, unequally defined and often ignored by our language, words not only reflect their secondary status in our society, but also reinforce it. By socially constraining women, language actually works to subtly define a woman's place in society. For example, a woman's place is often clarified by her relationship to a man. John Jones will always be referred to simply as Mr. Jones, but depending on her state of matrimony, Sue Jones could have several different titles. If she is single, she may be Miss Jones or Ms. Jones, but if she is married, she will be referred to as Mrs. Jones or

even Mrs. John Jones. If society continues to make women invisible linguistically, rape stories will continue to make women invisible too.

### Rape Myths

Rape myths are distorted proverbs that govern female sexuality. Eternized by socialization processes that govern gender behavior, these myths deliberately obscure the true nature of rape. In normalizing violence against women, these damaging ideas naturalize the sexist, racist and classist beliefs that are evident in our society. Because they fit so neatly into the good girl and bad girl narratives, it was very easy for reporters to follow conventional reporting practices and simply use a myth laden “cookie cutter” approach to write about these two rape cases. Instead of digging deeper and attempting to explain the societal reasons for this crime, the reporters chose to ignore the intertwining of race, class and gender present in these two cases.

The Central Park jogger case hit the headlines was because it played perfectly into the “black beast attacks white virgin” frame reporters throughout history have used for rape. This rape did not occur in the home; instead it transpired on a lonely section of a dark path in a dangerous section of Central Park. The rape was executed by a group of strangers—minority, lower class youths. Depicted as a gang of “teen-age mutants” (Glaberson, 8 Aug. 1990, p. B3), the youths were described as using their “predatory instincts” to carry out their uncontrollable bestiality (Pitt, 25 April 1989, p. B1).

The Central Park victim also desperately fought off her attackers. According to the officer who found her “the woman was still moving as if fighting off her assailants,



although the evidence shows she had been attacked four hours earlier and left for dead” (Sullivan, 4 July 1990, section 1, p. 33). She continued to exhibit this extraordinary resistance, even when she was safe in a hospital bed. An emergency room nurse who treated the jogger said “she was swinging her arms and kicking so hard that doctors and nurses trying to save her life were forced to tie her arms and legs down with gauze bandages” (Sullivan, 7 July 1990, section 1, p. 25).

For the woman who accused Smith of rape, differing variables made the story fit into a another damaging mythical mold. Since Smith was not black, nor was he of a lower class than the victim, the rape became a story of he said/she said. And as noted earlier, most reporters chose to focus on Smith’s view of the encounter. For these reporters, it was obvious that Bowman provoked the rape by spending the evening drinking and dancing with Smith. She was wearing Victoria’s Secret underpants the night she willingly went home with Smith and she took off her pantyhose before walking on the beach with him, all signs that further proved their hypothesis that she had planned to have sexual relations. Her screams were not heard by anyone in the Kennedy estate and she was not seriously injured in the assault. For these reasons, she was classified as a woman scorned, revengeful because Smith had accidentally called her “Kathy” during their encounter.

Since Bowman exhibited the audacity to actually go to the police and accuse Smith of rape, her stability was questioned. Several times after the incident, Patrick Kennedy, Smith’s cousin, referred to the victim as “a real weirdo, “whacked out” (Suro, 15 May 1991, p. A23) and as a “Fatal Attraction type” (Margolick, 7 Dec. 1991, section 1, p. 8).

Smith also called Bowman "a real nut" (Margolick, 11 Dec. 1991, p. A1). Police reports citing "psychological factors" as the reason the woman didn't report the rape earlier also made her seem unstable (Suro, 3 April 1991, p. A12). In addition to all of this, Bowman had a storied past with men, including giving birth to an illegitimate child and having several abortions. Her checkered history also included evidence of drug use and a bad driving record.

It was obvious that Fox Butterfield, a reporter who wrote six stories about the case, including the infamous April 17, 1991 Bowman profile, did not believe the victim's version of how events transpired on March 30, 1991. Butterfield's article titled *Increasing Questions Impede Case of Kennedy Nephew, Investigators Say* (15 April 1991) seemed designed solely to question Bowman. Recounting the evening's happenings with a dubious tone, Butterfield flagrantly questioned her actions 11 times in the 1,327 word article.

#### Gender of reporters

This research looked at the gender of the authors of *The Times* articles that were analyzed to determine if female reporters covered the two rape cases, and if so, if their coverage differed from male reporters' stories in terms of using descriptive words and rape myths.

Gender of the author was determined by the first name. Authors with the names Alan, Alex, Andrew, Bill, Craig, David, Dean, Dennis, Ellis, Frank, Hans, James, Jeremy, Jim, Jonathan, Larry, Michael, Patrick, Roberto, Roger, Sam, Stuart, Thomas, Tim,

Walter and William were determined to be male. A.M. Rosenthal referred to himself as a "newspaperman" in his editorial so he was also counted as a male. The name Egon (Mayor) was unknown to the researcher, but the web site [www.egonmayer.com](http://www.egonmayer.com) featured an Egon Mayor who was listed as a professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, the same title attributed to the Egon Mayor who contributed the editorial. A photograph at this web site proved Mayor's male gender. The name Michel (Marriott) was also unknown to the researcher. A photograph at [www.nytimes.com/learning/students/ask\\_reporters/marriott.html](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/students/ask_reporters/marriott.html) determined that he was male. The name Fox (Butterfield) was unknown to the researcher. A photograph at [www.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/saigon/reporter.html](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/saigon/reporter.html) ascertained that he was male. Finally, editorial contributor Kingsley R. Browne was defined as being an associate professor of law at Wayne State University. A search of the Wayne State University Law School web site found professor matching this name. A photograph at [www.law.wayne.edu/Faculty%20Profiles/browne.htm](http://www.law.wayne.edu/Faculty%20Profiles/browne.htm) established Browne's male gender.

Authors who were determined to be female had the following names: Anna, Anne, Catharine, Catherine, Charlotte, Deirdre, Elizabeth, Felicia, Gina, Jane, Joyce, Lisa, Louise, Mary, Sara, Susan, Pamela, Ruth and Wendy. The name Raleigh was unfamiliar to the researcher, but in her published the letter to the editor, she referred to herself as a rape survivor so it was concluded that she was female.

The researcher was unable to determine if Alix S. Pustilnik and Robin Toner were male or female. One authored a letter to the editor, while the other wrote one news

article. Both of these authors contributed to the coverage of the Smith case. Because their gender was unknown, these two authors were not counted in the analysis for this section of the Smith case. And, as they would only prove to cancel the other out, the two articles co-written by a male and a female author were also not counted in the Smith analysis.

The disparity between the number of female and males reporters covering the Central Park jogger case was immense. In the 148 articles analyzed, 106, or almost 72%, were written by men. Four of these were editorials. Of the 106 articles authored by a man, Ronald Sullivan's byline appeared on 76 of them. Sullivan actually wrote 51% of the stories *The New York Times* published about the Central Park jogger case during the time period between April 19, 1989 and March 21, 1991. Of the remaining 42 articles, 22% carried no byline. Female reporters only accounted for six news stories and four editorials, meaning women authored less than 7% of the articles published about the Central Park jogger.

The gender balance was also extremely skewed with reporters covering the Smith rape case. Over 56% of the 131 articles analyzed about the Smith case were written by men, while only 14% were submitted by women. The remaining 30% carried no byline. Of those authored by men, 64 were news articles. This means that 60% of the "factual" articles about the Smith rape case that appeared in *The Times* between the dates of March 30, 1991 and December 28, 1991 were written by male reporters. All of the stories that carried no byline were news articles, leaving less than 3% of the new stories in *The New*

*York Times* covering the Smith rape case to be written by women. The percentages of male and female editorial authors were much closer. Almost 58% of the editorials were penned by female authors. In publishing one of these letters to the editor, *The Times* respected the wishes of the rape victim/author and did not print her name.

Considering that the number of female reporters who authored articles for these cases was almost infinitesimal, the researcher concluded that the groupings were not large enough to compare the articles written by male and female reporters. The researcher is hopeful that this problem would not arise in future studies.

#### Virgin or Vamp

As previously discussed, several feminist researchers believe news stories about rape treat the victims either as “good girls” who did nothing wrong or as “bad girls” who were asking for it. This study analyzed *The New York Times* articles about the Central Park rape jogger case and the Smith rape case to find evidence of Benedict’s (1992) virgin or vamp theory.

The power of Benedict’s (1992) eight variables was evident in the Central Park jogger case, with the results forming a mix in the victim’s favor. She was never reported to be an “alleged victim.” The white jogger was attacked by a group of strangers, a “wolf pack” of black and Hispanic youths characterized as “wilding beasts.” One editorial described the media as declaring that “the people in jail are wolves—no, worse than animals, some kind of hideous mutants” (Rosenthal, 5 May 1989, p. A35). By turning the defendants into animals, reporters made it clear that this was a group motivated by

uncontrollable urges. "There was little doubt that if those accused of the attack were indeed responsible they were typical teen-agers who had been transformed into something else while wilding" (Kaufman, 26 April 1989, p. A1). And this transformation was not reversible according to Peter Reinhartz, chief prosecutor for the Family Court Division of the city's Law Department. "I think that kids like this, given what I would call their predatory nature, are people who, given the chance, would do something like this again. There really isn't any way to control them" (as quoted by Pitt, 25 April 1989, p. B1)

The youths, all residents of East Harlem housing projects, were of a lower class than the young Wall Street professional. The victim, an Upper East Side resident, was identified as being an investment banker 68 times. Her age was noted 83 times. Instead of using her name, *The Times* repeatedly described, and therefore defined, the jogger by her age and class; She was the "28-year-old investment banker." Several times the jogger was reported as being "beautiful." And, though some saw the woman as taking a foolish risk for running alone late at night, others applauded her for her dedication. Her intense discipline, it was noted, was what powered her running and her 12-hour workdays. (Quindlen, 22 July 1990). For young professionals, this type of devotion was what made a person in her social circle successful.

Finally, the youths used weapons in their attack and severely injured the jogger. "The woman was struck on the head with a length of pipe. Her attackers repeatedly rained blows on her head with a jagged rock and a brick." A doctor testifying in the case said "part of the victim's skull was 'crushed in'" and "her eye pupils showed 'signs of

impending death.” The victim’s injuries were so extensive that “the normal rippled surface of her brain was flattened by the force of the blows she received,” and “her left eyeball was struck so hard that it ‘exploded’ back through the rear of its socket” (Sullivan, 17 Aug. 1990, p. B1). When she recovered and returned to work, Mayor David Dinkins portrayed her “as a symbol of hope for the city” (Barron, 20 Aug. 1990, p. B4). All of these factors made the jogger a “virgin” in Benedict’s (1992) eyes.

In the Smith rape case, the resultant was almost exactly opposite of the Central Park jogger case. This time, the victim was attacked by a man of the same race who was of a higher class than she, and like the victim in the Central Park jogger case, the press continually referred to his affluent position. Smith was identified as being a Kennedy nephew 94 times. Ten times he was labeled as the “Kennedy Nephew” in headlines. Smith’s status as a medical student at Georgetown University was also noted 16 times. This time, the victim spent her evening drinking and partying before the assault. Instead of staying home with her young daughter, the woman was still at the bar well after the last round of drinks was served at 3 a.m. Though she had only met her assailant for the first time that evening, she had been comfortable enough with him to offer him a ride home. Smith used no weapon besides his body to hold her down, nobody heard her scream for help, and she was treated for only minor injuries. This time, the press was telling the story of a young woman with a reputation, a long night of drinking, and a defendant from a famous family. According to Benedict’s (1992) theory, the press had found the perfect “vamp.”

*The New York Times* proceeded to play the vamp card for all it was worth. On April 17, 1991, the same day *The Times* announced it had decided to change policy and began naming the Palm Beach victim, the paper also ran a lengthy, unflattering profile of Bowman capped with the headline *Woman in Florida Rape Inquiry Fought Adversity and Sought Acceptance*. This story brought a tidal wave of discontent from readers and staffers.

Haughtily describing the woman's life, the profile begins by telling that Bowman "was born into a modest working class family outside Akron, Ohio, but moved sharply up the economic scale 10 years ago after her divorced mother married a wealthy industrialist." Readers learned that her mother "was a secretary making less than \$200 a week at the time she sued for divorce" and that she had "asserted that her husband was physically threatening her." Mrs. Bowman was later "described as the 'longstanding girlfriend'" in the divorce case of a wealthy industrialist, whom she later married.

The profile proceeded to tell about Bowman's "poor academic record" and her "little wild streak." An anonymous "friend" claimed "that meant that she and her friends liked to drive fast cars, go to parties and skip classes." Her friend also told reporters that "she was more concerned about being accepted by her peers than with getting good grades." This was so important that, in the profile, her poor academic record drew two mentions, while rumor of her "wildness" was discussed three times. Readers were also reminded three times that Bowman's young child is illegitimate.



Using information retrieved from the records of the Florida Department of Highway Safety, the article moved on to report that Bowman "received 17 tickets for speeding, careless driving or being involved in an accident between 1982 and 1990." Readers even learned that "in several cases she was driving more than 70 miles an hour in a 55-mile-an-hour zone" and that "in 10 cases, her license was suspended for her failure to pay the fines assessed for these violations. In one instance her license was suspended, from August 1986 until September 1987, after she was found to be driving without a proper license and for her failure to appear in court." In case anyone was wondering, *The Times* also told that "over the last three years she has been driving a black Mazda sports coupe."

As for Bowman's social life, "during the 1980's the woman also frequented Palm Beach's expensive bars and nightclubs." A former bartender told the reporters, "She was always having lots of fun out there on the scene." Another acquaintance added, "She liked to drink and have fun with the ne'er-do-wells in cafe society." Readers even learned that a few weeks before the rape, Bowman came into a restaurant after midnight when the kitchen was closed, but the cook still fixed her a special dinner. Later that evening, he accompanied her to a nearby bar where she disappointed him "when she fell into conversation with several other men."

According to the article, Bowman's house in Jupiter "appears empty, with the blinds drawn, except in her daughter's room. There, on a shelf, are children's books, including a copy of 'Babar's Anniversary Album' and 'Two Minute Bible Stories'"

(Butterfield & Tabor, 1991, p. A17). According to Bowman, "these books are only visible by trespassing on my property, going over shrubbery and voyeuristically, criminally, peering into a one-year-old baby girl's bedroom window" (Gersh, 1992, p. 12).

The Bowman profile used five identified sources including a spokesman for the firm where her mother had worked, and four acquaintances from the Palm Beach bar and restaurant scene. The profile made heavy use of unidentified sources, as in "friends say," "said a school official who spoke on the condition he not be identified," "said a woman who knew her at the time," "a friend recalled," "the friend said." In fact, there were so many unidentified sources used in the profile that it was almost impossible to accurately differentiate to count them. Though "*The Times* normally avoids the use of negative statements about people by unidentified accusers" (Glaberson, 26 April 1991, p. A14), in this story unidentified sources were noted for giving information about Bowman's poor academic record and her little wild streak. They also said she liked to go to parties and that she was an unmarried mother. These were all things readers most likely construed as negative.

*The Times'* newsroom exploded the day after the story ran. Criticism of the story was loud and the editorial staff was forced to defend the standards of their newspaper. Columnist Anna Quindlen (21 April 1991) stated her disgust by saying,

In the face of what we did in the Central Park case, the obvious conclusion was that women who graduate from Wellesley, have prestigious jobs and are raped by

a gang of black teen-agers will be treated fairly by the press. And women who have 'below-average' high school grades, are well known at bars and dance clubs, and say that they have been raped by an acquaintance from an influential family after a night of drinking will not. (section 4, p. 17)

More than 100 Times staff members signed a letter of protest about the "outing," while approximately 350 attended a staff meeting held to discuss the handling of the case. At the meeting, Executive Editor Max Frankel, Assistant Managing Editor Allan M. Siegal and National Editor Soma Golden stood by their decision to publish Bowman's name after the NBC news piece ran. The trio did "acknowledge some deficiencies in editing" but Siegal said, "the right thing became of forlorn gesture because it would have no consequences and we are not in the business of keeping information from our readers just for public relations" (Glaberson, 26 April 1991, p. A14). Many staffers left the hostile meeting unsatisfied with the explanations provided by the editorial staff. One attendee declared, "They didn't get it. They don't understand they set it up to look like the slut asked for it. We came here because we didn't want to work for people who would run stories like that" (Kurtz, 20 April 1991, p. D1).

*The Times* did attempt to acknowledge a shortfall in its reporting on the Bowman profile in an Editor's Note on April 26, 1991, stating that it regretted any inference that the portrayal of "the life and background" of Bowman and her family had "suggested that *The Times* was challenging her account." The apology explained that "the article drew no conclusions about the truth of her complaint," though many readers had "inferred that it

very publication" it was doing so. (p. A3). Was this really an apology? In writing the article, *The Times* blamed the victim for a crime committed against her. Now in "apologizing" the newspaper was blaming the reader for inferring the obvious.

The majority of 27 editorials analyzed appeared shortly after *The Times* ran the profile on the victim. Most believed the woman had been greatly wronged by *The Times* and that this style of reporting would stop future rape victims from coming forward. Several of the editorials were written by well known feminist scholars, including Catherine MacKinnon, whose article stating rape should be tried as a civil case of sexual equality evoked passionate responses from seven readers.

#### The Name Debate

The name debate was also covered extensively during both of the rape cases. Though the name of the Central Park jogger had always been readily available from court documents, for the almost two years since the trial, news organizations had granted her wish for anonymity. For this case, *The Times* Assisting Managing Editor, Allan Siegal, explained the paper's position by stating, "This victim stands accused of nothing and this society would find it repugnant to add to her obloquy" (quoted by Kaplan & Leonard, 2 April 1990, p. 48). On eight separate occasions, *The New York Times* included a sentence explaining that although her name was public record, the newspaper does not identify victims of rape unless they seek to be identified. On April 22, 1989, *The Times* chose to respect the wishes of a male jogger who was also attacked by the group of young men on the night the jogger was raped. "The police said he did not want his name released" (Pitt,

22 April 1989, section 1, p. 1). *The Times* did disclose his name. In the same article, the names, addresses and schools of the seven defendants were listed. The youths were all either 14, 15 or 16 years old. According to *The Times*, "The police normally withhold the names of minors who are accused of crimes, but officials said they made public the names of the youths charged in the attack on the woman because of the seriousness of the incident" (Pitt, 22 April 1989, section 1, p. 1).

Virtually all of the mainstream American newspapers covering the Smith case also followed conventional news practice and did not identify Bowman. A LEXIS-NEXIS reQUESTer People in the News search form with key words Patricia and Bowman, found several exceptions, including *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), and *The San Francisco Chronicle*. The most prestigious, and therefore surprising, newspaper to break with tradition was *The New York Times*. Though the newspaper had just completed almost two years worth of stories about a high profile rape case where it did not name the victim, on April 17, 1991, *The Times* ran two articles identifying Bowman as Smith's accuser. One was the unflattering profile. In the second, a 287-word news story titled *On Names in Rape Cases*, the newspaper explained that it "ordinarily shields the identities of complainants in sex crimes," but "NBC's nationwide broadcast {which also broke with usual policy and named the victim} took the matter of her privacy out of their hands" (p. A17). *The Times* editors said they had discussed the possibility of naming Bowman days before the NBC broadcast, but had decided against it because "they could visualize the woman moving to another area of the country and

escaping the stigma of being involved in the notorious case” (Glaberson, 26 April 1991, A14). After NBC news aired the woman’s name, *The Times* stated that “The right thing became a forlorn gesture because it would have no consequences and we are not in the business of keeping information from our readers just for public relations” (Glaberson, 26 April 1991, p. A14). In effect, *The Times* chose to name the victim because it felt that its prerogative to withhold the information was lost. This reasoning is childlike in its simplicity, evoking memories of mothers asking, “If Billy jumped off a cliff, would you do that too?”

After identifying Bowman on April 17, *The Times* again named her in stories published on April, 18, April 19, April 21, April 22, April 27, May 2 and May 8. Articles about the case that ran on April 23 and April 26 did not identify her. At times, it seemed as though the newspaper was of two minds. On May 8, Bowman was named in an editorial column, but not in a news story that appeared on the same date. After May 8, Bowman’s name disappeared from *The New York Times*, though stories about the case certainly did not. Though they offered no explanation, the paper may have begun to treat the case differently because Smith was formally charged with rape and battery on May 9. Bowman’s name did not appear again until after December 19, when she willingly agreed to appear and be identified on the ABC news program Prime Time Live.

The reasoning for not naming Bowman was not explained until December 5, more than six months after her name had appeared and disappeared from coverage. Buried at the very end of a 1716-word story about the trial, the reporter noted that, “the paper has

resumed withholding her name, because editors now believe her privacy is being effectively shielded” (Margolick, 5 Dec. 1991, p. A1). How her privacy was now being shielded was not discussed and no other explanation was given. Was *The Times* assuming everything it had written about the Palm Beach woman was now forgotten? Considering the amount of public interest that accompanied the debate, *The Times* should have been more timely and public when it changed its policy about naming Bowman.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based on the information provided in the data analysis and discussion chapters of this study and attempt to answer the five research questions posed in chapter five.

Question 1: Did articles published in *The New York Times* about the Central Park jogger case and the Smith case contain sexist descriptive words? *The New York Times* articles written about the Central Park jogger case and the Smith case did contain sexist descriptive words, though they did not appear as frequently as the researcher had expected them to appear. Seventeen of the 24 words Benedict (1992) identified in her book *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes* are not used in articles about either case. Also, though it does appear in several articles, the word pretty is not used to describe the victim in either case. The word girl appeared three times in stories about the Central Park jogger case and nine times in the articles about the Smith case. Wild was used to describe the victim in the Smith case nine times, but it was never used to refer to the victim in the jogger case. Hysterical was another descriptor used only for the victim in the Smith case. This word appeared four times. Twice, the prosecutor in the Central Park jogger case described the part of the attack on the jogger by using the word stripped. This word did not appear in articles about the Smith case. The Central Park rape was referred to as having sex five times, while sexual intercourse and sexual



relations were used to describe the crime in the Smith case. They appeared seven and six times respectively. Finally, the word fondled was used to describe the molestation of the Central Park jogger three times. This word did not appear in the coverage of the Smith case.

Question 2: Are rape myths evident in the selected rape stories? Throughout the analyzed *New York Times* articles, substantial evidence supported previous research demonstrating that rape myths are used in reporting sexual assault cases. In fact, the only reason the Central Park jogger case garnered such a monumental amount of coverage was because it fit perfectly into the century-old mold of a stereotypical rape. Here was an innocent white female brutally attacked by a group of unknown black men. Ambushed on a dark path, the affluent jogger desperately fought off a gang of lower class youths.

Gratuitous attention was paid to the Smith case because of Smith's relationship to the Kennedy family. And, since reporters had to cover this licentious tale, it was done in the easiest way possible—by using myths to blame the victim for the attack.

Disbelieving that someone of the stature of Smith would or even could rape, reporters concentrated on painting the woman as a deserving victim. In its rush to define Bowman as a woman of loose moral character, *The Times* condemned her for being an unwed mother, for having several legal abortions and for getting too many speeding tickets. *The Times* even went so far as to punish this victim for her mother's past sexual behavior.

Nothing was out of bounds in the game designed to make Bowman look like a cheap floozy. The articles about this case focused on the myth of "a woman scorned," making

it look like Bowman had wanted to have sex with Smith, but then cried rape for revenge when he acted like a cad afterward.

Question 3: Did female reporters cover the two rape cases, and if so, did their coverage differ from male reporters' stories in terms of using descriptive words and rape myths? *The Times* had very few female reporters cover the two rape cases. In fact, for the Central Park jogger case, less than 7% of the articles were authored by a female reporter. In the Smith case, only 14% of the articles were written by a woman, and a large majority of these were editorials. In fact, less than 3% of the new stories in *The New York Times* covering the Smith rape case were written by a female reporter. As these numbers were so small, the researcher determined that a comparison would not be possible. A study to determine the number of male and female reporters covering recent rape cases would be an excellent topic for future research.

Question 4: Is Benedict (1992) correct in concluding that a victim of rape will be treated as either a virgin or a vamp? According to Benedict, almost all rape victims fit neatly into one of two molds. Depending on eight variables, the press will label a woman as either a virgin or a vamp. Because they fell on opposite ends of each of these variables, this hypothesis proved true in both cases. Every one of the eight characteristics that rape myths the press presumes to attach to bad girls was evident in the Smith case and Bowman was treated like a deserving victim, a vamp, by the press. In the case of the Central Park jogger, the victim did not have to carry the stigma of any of the variables and she was treated with reverence and respect by the media.

Question 5: Is media coverage responsible enough to warrant openly naming rape victims without their consent? The media is not responsible enough to warrant openly naming rape victims without their consent. As evidenced in this study, the habits reporters use to cover rape stories are racist, classist and sexist, as well as terribly inaccurate. The fact that the only rape stories that warrant coverage are those that fit neatly into the virgin or vamp image is alarming and dangerous. In a society where one rape occurs every 46 seconds, almost one in eight women will be a victim of rape. To ignore the 80% of these cases where the victim knew her rapist is to ignore the real facts. In their use of rape myths, reporters perpetuate lies and prevaricate about the real reason women get raped. Rape is a crime that carries a stigma. Though the only way that stigma may someday disappear is if more victims find the courage to tell their story, each victim must be able to make this choice on her own. A news organization does not have the right to "out" a victim simply because she found the courage to report a crime.

#### Possibilities for Future Research

This analysis of *The New York Times* coverage of the Central Park jogger rape case and the Smith rape case is a very small part of a growing body of research about an often misunderstood crime. A direct way to continue this research would be to contact and interview the various reporters and editors from *The New York Times* who covered the Central Park jogger case and the Smith case. During this interview, it would be especially interesting to note the race, age and class of each of the reporters. This in-depth research

could qualitatively identify the reasons for the skewed coverage and perhaps create a realization of the inherent sexist viewpoint that exists in the reporting of this crime.

An analysis of the different sources that appeared in the articles about the Central Park jogger and Smith rape cases would also be a strong addition to future research. The researcher believes it would be interesting to compare the numbers and types of sources found in the two rape cases. In this research, it would be especially informative to look for alternative sources. Because rape is such a stigmatizing crime, alternative voices, like counselors and hot line volunteers, can realistically serve as the voice of the victim. With these two cases, it is the researcher's determination that there was very little if any use of alternative sources. It is the hope of the researcher that this has changed over the past decade. To determine if this is true, future research could systematically find evidence of alternative sources in current rape cases to determine if the word of the victim advocate is being heard. For strong rape reporting, this type of alternative voice must be loud and clear.

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