

Media's language: A look at language through a response based practice lens

Wade D. Hirschfield

City University of Seattle in Canada

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Literature Review.....	11
Canadian Law.....	12
Response Based Practice.....	14
Media.....	15
Methodology.....	16
Challenges and Adjustments.....	19
Analysis.....	20
Method.....	20
Data Acquisition.....	22
Data Coding.....	23
Results.....	24
Data.....	24
Table 1.....	25
Inconsistences.....	25
Data Analysis.....	26
Language Samples and Explanations.....	26
Concealing Violence.....	26
Language examples of Concealing Violence.....	27
Obscuring responsibility.....	32
Language examples of obscuring responsibility.....	32
Concealing resistance.....	37
Language examples of Concealing Resistance.....	37
Pathologize and/ or Blame Victim.....	42
Language examples of pathologize and/or blame victim.....	43
Clear Language.....	47
Language examples of Clear Language.....	47
Discussion.....	51

References..... 56

Abstract

In the social context that we live in many victims of sexualized violence do not report the violence and/or seek the services that can be provided to them to support them through the horrific violence that they endure at the hands of perpetrators. This is due to the fact that whether or not a victim of violence reports is incredibly complicated as it has major implications and is logically based on her perception of what will happen if she does report. This perception and/or understanding of how others will respond to her is based on both public discourse (the ideas and perceptions of the public in general) and her experience of how other victims were responded to in the past. In the minds of social constructionists, the language that we experience and use plays a key role in our social actions. In order to understand the state of the language, this thesis did a critical analysis of the language used in the media, specifically online news articles. It was found that through using a Response Based Practice lens on five different news sources, all with five articles per (N = 25), obscured language was used 3.99 times more often than clear language. Some of these examples were then discussed which ultimately showed that the state of the language is problematic. The author of this thesis is not naive to the fact that even if we changed our language, many problems in reporting would still exist. Language is an important piece to address as it is a major contributor into public discourse, and therefore into our response to victims of sexualized violence.

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acknowledge that all the knowledge gained through this thesis comes off the backs of victims of sexualized violence. Although their names do not show up in the references they are truly where this knowledge originates from. I want to thank my amazing wife for her continual patience and support for me during this process; you are a wonderful partner and my hope is that everything we do reflects who we are as partners. I want to thank my family for putting up with my continual conversation and passion about a topic that is hard to talk about. I want to thank my mentors in this field: Allan Wade, Linda Coates and Shelly Bonnah; you have all turned my world upside down many times and not only helped me see the world through a new lens, continually hold me accountable to a standard of excellence. I want to thank Carmen Anderson for her support along the way as we write our thesis together; without your continual pressure and race to be done I'm sure I would still be back at the proposal stage. Last and definitely not least I want to thank three teachers who didn't give up on me; Mrs. Stenson, Mrs. MacGregor and Mr. Stack. When other teachers said that I wasn't smart enough to graduate high school, you told me that they were wrong.

Introduction

In 1983 Canada passed Bill C-127. The purpose of the bill was to illustrate that violence is ubiquitous with sexualized assault. In doing so, the hope was that perpetrators would face tougher penalties and thus, more victims would report the offence. Yet thirty-two years later “Sexual assault is [still] among the crimes which are least likely to be reported to the police” (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, as Benoit et al. (2015) says, it is extremely challenging to get an accurate number of the reported percentage of sexualized assaults; many estimates are less than 10% (PEIRSAC, n.d.; SACHA, n.d; SexualAssaults.ca, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2013; WAVAW, n.d.). Therefore, we know that although tortured, humiliated, and dehumanized, many individuals who experience sexualized violence remain silent.

Before making a judgment about whether or not victims should report, it is important to look at the rationale (“Based on or in accordance with reason or logic” Rational, 2016) behind that statement. If we claim that being silent is irrational, we are stating that within the victims’ context it is illogical not to report, that they should have chosen differently, and that it would have been beneficial for them to do so. These are all major assumptions which require an expert stance, meaning that the person judging the behavior has more understanding of the logic and ramifications of reporting than the victims themselves. It does not take into consideration that reporting sexualized violence is not the sanctuary many believe it is; “Victims of violence face the threat of further violence, from mild censure to extreme brutality, for any act of open defiance. Consequently, open defiance is the least common form of resistance” (Scott, 1990, as cited in Coates & Wade, 2007). Because reporting violence is itself an act of open defiance, it is logical for some victims not to choose to report as reporting could put them in more danger than staying silent. Additionally, many victims do not want the perpetrator to be punished for the

assault; they just want the violence to stop (Wade, personal communication, July, 2016).

Furthermore, judging victims' silence also does not take into consideration the shame, guilt, and embarrassment they may experience after reporting (Sable et al., 2006; Taylor & Gassner, 2010; Vidal & Petrak, 2007). Therefore, because there are so many obstacles facing victims of sexualized violence, we cannot conclude that staying silent is irrational.

The victim's reporting context ultimately boils down to the victim's evaluation of what will happen if the assault is reported. What will people do? Will they believe the victim? Will they, can they stop the violence? What will others think? Will the victim be humiliated? What will happen to the perpetrator? How her family, her community, and supportive organizations respond formulate what is known as a 'social response.' An individual's perception of the social response she may receive is a major factor in any behavior (Coates & Wade, 2007), which would include her reporting of a sexualized assault. When this is connected with the idea that "there is a link between knowledge and social action," (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 5) what becomes clear is that our conceptualization of victims has major implications on our response to them, and therefore, in turn, victims' reporting rate of sexual assault.

It should be noted that I do not believe that "reporting" should always include the legal system. In many cases, the fear of the legal system prevents survivors from reporting. As mentioned earlier, many survivors do not wish the perpetrator to be punished, rather only that the violence will stop. To assume that the legal system should always be used when a sexualized assault occurs does not take into consideration the major financial implications that can happen, nor the response from other governmental organizations which may break apart the family. That being said, I do believe that the legal system can support the victim and must do so if either the victim wishes, or all other solutions have failed to keep the victim safe, in all aspects of the

word. It should also be noted that it is not just the legal system that is in place to support victims if they do wish to report. Many social services are available to support victims, and in all cases, they require that the victims themselves report the violence to at least the individual doing the intake in order to know whether or not the individual seeking services meets the requirement of intake, and will benefit from the services that are offered. Therefore, what is meant by this thesis when using the term reporting, is that individuals have the freedom and safety to seek the assistance of which ever system they believe will support them the best, and that that system will be able to support them through a positive social response.

Mass media plays a significant role in public discourse (Gerbner, 2013; Karameti, 2015; Wakefield et al., 2010). More pointedly, “Mass media has a significant influence on people’s way of understanding life, the world and, thus, their existence in general. Due to this fact, it is considered one of the most significant centers of power.” (Claudia, 2016, p.47). Thus, mass media is a major player in society’s conceptualization of, and therefore, social response to victims of sexualized assault. In exploring the media, we can gain clues about how it conceptualizes victims; “Media contain various cues to opinions of others and therefore serve as an important source of information about the climate of opinion.” (Zerback et al., 2015, p. 421).

The way in which language is used is critical, as it is the way in which we communicate ideas to each other. This is extremely important when it comes to violence; “language in itself reproduces again and again the violence it was supposed to reveal” (Liebsch, 2013). Although words and language can never describe every situation perfectly, Response Based Practice (RBP) and Leonard (2014) highlight the importance of word choice and how the words we use can affect others’ perceptions. To the point, “Significant differences were found between the amount of victim blame when the language varied in the sexual situations read by the participants as well

as between the amount of perpetrator responsibility when the language varied in the sexual situations ...” (Leonard, 2014).

Given the impact that media has on our lives and the importance of language, what is essential in knowing the context of sexual assault survivors is answering the question: How is language used in the media to describe both the acts and the survivors of sexualized assault? This thesis attempts to answer this question by doing a discourse analysis on the language of the media and critiquing it with a Response Based Practice (RBP) lens. It will first look at the prevalence of problematic language, then it will take examples of the problematic language and analyze them, and then provide an alternative example of language that more accurately depicts the experiences of sexualized assault victims. In doing so, this thesis will show the state of, the problematic nature of, and offer solutions to the language.

The aim of this thesis is to understand the current state of the language used by the media with respect to sexualized violence. This will be done by analyzing the language of online news articles through a RBP lens. My hypothesis is that there is a significant level of obscured language used in online news articles with respect to sexualized violence. I believe that I will find a significant level of language that obscures the magnitude of violence victims face, what the cause of the violence is, and what the victims of violence do in order to resist it. If this is the case, this thesis will then show how language leads to public discourses that are obscured, which has a significant effect on the way we respond to victims of violence, and which ultimately leads to victims making the choice not to report and seek help.

It should be noted that the members of the online media themselves are members of society, who have grown up hearing and using the common language surrounding sexualized violence. This would mean that these individuals would have a similar, if not the same, public

discourse. Therefore, although these individuals could be a part of perpetuating the negative public discourse surrounding sexualized violence through problematic language, they did not initiate it. The reality is that this is an extremely complex system which is continually perpetuated by many individuals, in the majority of settings.

It should be noted that I am not the first person to do a critical analysis on the language surrounding sexualized assault. I have had the privilege of learning from many of the members of the Center of Response Based Practice. It is from their tutelage that I have begun to take a critical look at the usage of language within violence. The publications that I have examined pertaining to this way of thinking include, but are not limited to, Coates et al. (1994); Coates (1997); Coates & Wade, (2007); Wade (1997); Wade (2002). In studying this material, I went through a paradigm shift in the way that I look at language; these papers and the direct contact and teaching I have received from these authors have had a major impact on the way this thesis is written. Therefore, I cannot easily distinguish between my own thoughts and ideas directly taught to me, so even if not directly quoted, much of the work seen in this thesis should be credited to these papers and these mentors in my life.

If everyone entrusted in the support of victims comes together to use more accurate language for a realistic depiction of who victims of assault are and the horrific violence they endure at the hands of perpetrators, we can reformulate our toxic concepts of victims and create a united front to support them. We can become better social advocates, better at addressing the systemic and individualized oppression they are facing, and better at supporting them on their journey of healing. When our concepts of who sexualized assault victims are, and what they go through ultimately formulate a positive social response, we can collectively build a context where individuals may find sanctuary in reporting.

Literature Review

This thesis is, at least in part, a response to a call for action requested by other research:

- "...to assess the extent to which the four-discursive-operations (of language) appear in professional, academic and public discourse and to assess the influence of these operations where they do appear" (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 521).
- "Should future researchers wish to explore this particular matter further, a broader data capture and mathematical analytic process that addresses these limitations may be enlightening. Such strategies may include noting the number of times certain words, quotes, phrases are used or eliminated comparatively across mediums" (Sovdi, 2016, p. 77).
- "We believe that in order to accomplish this [a world without violence], prevention and intervention must involve carefully considered use of language to represent the actions of perpetrators and victims in a more accurate and judicious manner" (Coates, Todd & Wade, 2003, p. 120).

There are many building blocks on which this thesis is built, and although a complete understanding of all of these building blocks is impossible to write within the scope of this piece of research, they are integral to it. These building blocks include the role that media plays in creating and maintaining public discourse, a current understanding of Canadian criminal code pertaining to sexualized assault code, feminist theory, and a RBP lens on language. An extensive amount of research was done in order to understand these topics. Researching these topics included searching through the online library, looking through the references made in other pieces of research, and countless conversations pertaining to these topics with professors.

Canadian Law

As previously stated in the introduction, in 1983 Canada adopted Bill C-127 illustrating that violence is ubiquitous with sexualized assault. It attempted to do this by placing everything previously called rape into the sections pertaining to all assaults. The law abolished the word rape from the Canadian criminal code and reframed the crimes of rape, attempted rape, and indecent assault to the now three-tiered system of sexual assault.

The three tiers include sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon, and aggravated sexual assault, commonly known as levels 1, 2 and 3. Since levels 2 and 3 hinge on the understanding of level 1, it is integral to gain a solid understanding of the definition and practices of law surrounding the term *sexual assault*.

In searching through the Canadian Criminal Code, I was unable to find a working definition of sexual assault other than when a person commits an assault that is sexual in nature. That being said, Brennan, S., & Taylor-Butts, A., (2008) on the Statistics Canada website defined it as “sexual assault: A term used to refer to all incidents of unwanted sexual activity, including sexual attacks and sexual touching,” and again as “An assault committed in circumstances of a sexual nature such that the sexual integrity of the victim is violated. Level 1 involves minor physical injuries or no injuries to the victim.” I then searched through Martin et al. (2012), a commonly used legal text, and found that *R(Regina) v. Chase* (1987) defined it as “any act that violates the sexual integrity of another person, regardless of sexuality or sexual gratification.” We live in a society that presumes innocence until proven guilty. Unlike any other law, the presumption is that there was consent for the violation and it must be proven that there was not. “Rape is the only crime in which the victim’s actions are judged to demonstrate the lack of consent” (Carlen, 1994; MacKinnon, 1993; 1987, cited by Madriz, 1997, as cited in

Ar dovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002, p. 19). Therefore, to convict a person of sexualized assault, the task of the prosecutors is to prove that the victim did not consent to what happened and that their sexual integrity had been violated by the alleged perpetrator. The issue of consent is extremely complex when it comes to law; one piece that is critical to understand is that consent cannot be based on whether the victim uses open defiance. Although this seems to be logical, it does not take into consideration the immediate danger that many victims would face for openly defying the perpetrator, and therefore, their logical conclusions not to, in order to remain safe. Judgments in the legal system are based on the evidence that is shown in court and without open defiance it is challenging to find physical evidence. Where this becomes problematic is that it can build the public discourse that if there isn't evidence of physical resistance, the victim consented. This results in many cases either not proceeding to court, or ending in a not guilty verdict because victims do not have the physical evidence to prove they were raped, and therefore, cannot prove a lack of consent because they did not openly defy the perpetrator knowing that if they did so it would put them in more danger.

What is permissible in court changes the way we conceptualize what is important and therefore our conceptualization of the crime. For instance, one of the ways in which Bill C-127 attempted to change how we conceptualize victims was that it made past sexual history and marital status no longer an indicator for consent and in the case of sexual history impermissible in court. The idea is that past sexual history, or the fact that the individuals were married to each other, does not indicate whether consent was likely or not. This bill was famously upheld in the case *R(Regina) v. Darrach* (2000). The ruling concluded that

“To compel the complainant to be examined on her sexual history before the subject has been found to be relevant to the trial would invade the complainant's

privacy and discourage the reporting of crimes of sexual violence.” (Supreme Court Judgments, 2000).

On May 17th 1997 Canada adopted Bill C-46. Prior to the adoption of Bill C-46, defense were subpoenaing the accused's professional records (i.e. doctors', therapists', counsellors' records) and bringing them as evidence within the trial. As you would expect, due to the personal exposure, many survivors chose not to report, or if they did, would choose not to seek any professional help knowing that all that information could and would be used against them. In the case *R(Regina) v Mills* (1999), Bill C-46 was upheld. The counsel of the accused obtained partial records of the complainant that were held within a counselling organization. Later the counsel of the accused used these records as defense. The judge then denied the use of the records in court and made a motion that that information not be saved within the records (Supreme Court Judgments, 1999). What is important here is that this then allows victims of sexualized assault to have the freedom to report sexualized violence to other professionals without fear that it could be used against them in court.

Response Based Practice

RBP has three major principles surrounding violence: violence is social and unilateral, violence is deliberate, and resistance is ubiquitous. (Coates & Wade, 2007). RBP illustrates that language can be used to either violate or illuminate these principles:

“Language can be used to conceal violence, obscure and mitigate offenders' responsibility, conceal victims' resistance, and blame and pathologize victims.

Alternatively, language can be used to expose violence, clarify offenders' responsibility, elucidate and honor victims' resistance, and contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims.” (p. 513)

Integral to the way in which we look at language within all forms of violence is the concept of 'language of affect' versus 'language of response' (Wade, 2002). Both forms of language make assumptions. The 'language of affect' implies that the verb affects the noun, whereas the language of response implies that subjects respond (p. 15). For example, the language of affect would say "Traumatized by violence she could no longer go out at night." By using such language, the victim becomes passive to the effects of trauma. The thought process that follows includes psychopathology and expert therapy, and/or the use of pharmaceuticals to heal her from this trauma. In contrast is the language of response, "Due to her perception of possible danger heightened by her previous violations that happened during the night, she makes the judgment to stay home during the night and gets what she needs to get done during the day." What becomes clear in this sentence is she is acting out logically by using her strengths in her limited options within her context to overcome the oppression that she is facing. This is a complete paradigm shift from psychopathology to understanding that the survivor is acting rationally within her context. Thus, our choice of language has major implications on how we conceptualize victims.

Media

"Media can have a very powerful role in defining, maintaining, and even transforming the way we see the world." (Kitzinger, 2015, p. 31). Important to this thesis is understanding the influence the media has on public discourse. Bjursell & Bäckvall (2011, p. 154) state that "Media, with its influence on our everyday discussions, has the potential to influence our standpoint and, thereby, our actions." Fraser et al. (2016) agrees with this when the authors state that "discourses within the media can influence public attitudes and support or discourage stereotypical portrayals" (p. 1023).

The media's influence on public discourse pertaining to sexualized violence was directly studied in Kahlor & Morrison's article (2007) which shows that there was a positive correlation between media consumption and the beliefs of rape myths. Succinctly put by Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald (2002, p. 17): "The media exert a tremendous influence on our attitudes about what rape is, who the victim is, and who is to blame in rape cases."

When taking into consideration the law, RBP, and the importance of the language in the media many questions arise: How are we conceptualizing survivors of sexual assault? How does the law as well as society account for the differences seen in power and privilege when assessing whether a woman should report? How are we accounting for the survivor's resistance? and specifically for this thesis, How is this reflected in the language of the media?

Methodology

This thesis is a discourse analysis, in particular, a content analysis which uses an RBP lens. It will pay close attention to the language that is being used to describe the violent acts of the perpetrator, the acts of resistance of the victim, where the responsibility lies, and who is to blame. This thesis ultimately attempts to answer the question: How is language in news articles depicting and therefore formulating our concepts surrounding sexualized violence?

I have chosen a content analysis because it pays close attention to the usage of language, the underlying assumptions being made, the way in which it conceptualizes the subject of the sentence, and the historic and present use of language. It allows for the analysis of single words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, and shows how they all come together to form ideas which become public discourse.

For example, I and many individuals working in the field of sexualized violence have chosen to use the word *victim* rather than the word *survivor*. The reason behind this word choice

is that it highlights the perpetrator's responsibility for the act of violence. It frames the act of violence in a way that, although we know that victims are never passive to violence, they did not have the power to stop it. In common vernacular, the word survivor is used in many cases where there is no person responsible for the violation, such as medical conditions (cancer, ALS, Parkinson's, etc.). The word survivor may also suggest that the violation is over, and may not acknowledge the ways that the victims are continually being violated by societal social responses. Therefore, using the word victim rather than survivor paints a clearer picture of who did what to whom. This illustrates that single words have the power to change the meaning of sentences and we must be careful in our word choices.

An example of an analysis of a sentence could be the question: What was she wearing? This question is inferring that her choice of clothing was a potential cause for the assault, thus blaming the victim and concealing the responsibility of the perpetrator. Also, it does not account for why every woman that wears similar clothing is not violated in the same way, nor why another person did not violate her. It is in this way that words, then phrases, then paragraphs, and then ideas are formed into social discourses that can further harm survivors of assault.

A critical aspect of a content analysis is understanding the difference between a structural and post-structural approach to language and agreeing, at least in part, with the post-structural perspective. A structural approach claims there are concrete meanings to all words which are universally understood and unquestioned. A post-structural approach to language claims that although there are some agreed upon ideas about language, it is much more dynamic. Phillips & Jorgensen (2002) illustrate four founding principles of a post-structural approach to language: we must take a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge, language has historical and cultural specificity, there is a link between knowledge and social process, and there is a link

between knowledge and social action (p. 5). More briefly, "language is a 'machine' that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world" (p. 9).

A post-structural approach is important to understand as it highlights the way in which people generate their concepts of who victims are, what happens in violent encounters, who is responsible for the violence, what the victim could have done to prevent the violence, and many more concepts pertaining to violence. Therefore, if the language that is being used in a way to conceal violence, obscure responsibility, conceal resistance, and blame the victim, we will start to formulate our concepts about violence and response to victims in this way, which will ultimately lead to negative social responses, which will in turn discourage victims from reporting sexualized assaults.

A post-structural approach to language is systemic, meaning that many entities, such as those around us, the news media, academic and non-academic learning, come together in the creation of our personal understanding of language. With this in mind, it is also important to also bring in the feminist critique of systemic thinking, that is, the idea that those with more power have greater influence in the system than those with less power, and that many systems are created by those in power to allow them to remain in power. When this is taken into the idea of language, those in power alter and select the language that is being used to allow the system to remain.

Although a study on all forms of media would yield important information on the context of victims, this thesis specifically looks at the language of news reports and how they inadvertently or purposely (which does not matter for the purpose of this thesis) use language to depict the act, victims, and perpetrators of sexualized assault. I will use the internet to search through online news articles pertaining to the topic. I will then data code the language into five

different groupings as to whether they conceal the violence, obscure responsibility, conceal resistance, blame the victim, or whether they do the opposite. As illustrated, a discourse analysis gives us the opportunity to look at this and answer the question of how is language in news articles depicting and therefore formulating our concepts surrounding of sexualized violence.

Challenges and Adjustments

One clear and challenging aspect of this thesis was how to remain consistent throughout the analyses of all 25 online news articles. I took many actions to address this problem. I pre-read all the articles that were selected prior to analyzing any of them. I only analyzed one category at a time within an article to decrease the likelihood of distractions, and before I transferred the tallies from the articles themselves to the summary Excel sheet, I finished the first analyses of all the papers and re-evaluated them as I put the numbers in. This was done as a final review of the papers and gave the best opportunity to review all the information in a short time, in order to minimize any hidden external factors that may affect the study.

Another challenging aspect of this thesis was whether or not to question the language of the victims themselves. The point of contention is that everyone is entitled to their own language. That being said, because this thesis takes a social constructionist view of language, the victims' language itself is an example for social language. Also, the way that one victim describes her experience is heard by other victims, and thus has an equal amount of influence, if not more, in how other victims conceptualize sexual violence. For those two reasons, the language of the victims is included in the study.

Another challenging aspect of the data collection was how to handle words such as *allegedly* and *supposedly*. These terms, in fact, are used to protect the perpetrator from ideas of guilt and place the victim in such a position that she is not believed prior to the judgment of the

case. It is important to remember that in our society, *not guilty* is not the same as saying that the crime did not happen, only that there exists at least a shadow of a doubt that it did. That being said, to include this language completely negates the fact that the crime may have not happened and, although I choose to believe victims, to completely shut the door to the idea that it may have not is problematic. Therefore, it should be noted that I did not include these words in my data, and that if I had included such words as allegedly and supposedly, there would be higher occurrences of both concealing violence and obscuring responsibility in almost every article.

Analysis

The analysis that I have chosen to use for the study is a simple frequency distribution. The question that this answers is: How often is the language obscured (as defined in the methods section) versus clear? This will be given out as a ratio, which will be the number of obscured examples of language divided by the number of clear language findings. The ratio number will be calculated for each of the news sources as well as calculated for the meta-analysis of all newspaper sources. I have chosen to use a ratio as it contextualizes the data by indicating how many occurrences of obscure language per clear piece of language is found.

Method

In order to do this content analysis, I engaged in both quantitative and qualitative aspects of research. The quantitative aspect of this research (statistical analysis) analyzed the frequency of the obscured language used by the media in online news articles pertaining to sexualized assault. To obtain a broad picture of the current state of language in the news, and for the reasons explained in each section, I selected news articles from the following five major news sources across Canada:

1. The Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC). CBC was selected because is the government owned and operated news source in Canada. Although CBC has radio, television and online components, it was only the online component that was studied.
2. The Toronto Star. The Toronto Star was selected because it has the largest circulation of news in the private sector and the largest circulation of any local newspaper in Canada with a viewership in 2015 of 2.2 million readers (Newspapers Canada, 2015).
3. The Globe and Mail was selected because it is the second largest private news source in Canada with a circulation of 2.018 million (Newspapers Canada, 2015).
4. The Vancouver Sun. Although the number of readers of this newspaper pales in comparison to the other papers that were selected (820,000), it was selected in order to observe whether or not the same language is used in news articles in a completely different part of the country. The Vancouver Sun is based in Vancouver, British Columbia, which is located in western Canada rather than in central or eastern Canada.
5. The Toronto Sun. This news source was added to my selection based on an error that I made. In doing my research, I made the mistake of first looking at the Toronto Sun thinking it was the Toronto Star. It was only after I had finished my analysis of the five articles that I realized my confusion. That being said, the more data that is collected the clearer the broader picture is, therefore, I have chosen to keep the data in the study. It is also important to note that the paper also has a circulation of 850,000 readers.

The news articles were published between October 16, 2016 and March 23, 2017. This data range was selected based on the desire to have the most recent articles for the study and

capped off on March 23 as that was the date in which the data collection was completed.

Once the statistical analysis was completed I engaged in the qualitative aspect of this study. After finding the examples of obscured, I analyzed the true nature of the ways that they obscured language, and then selected examples that give a broad view of the problem. The selected examples were then discussed in full in the following results section in order to shed light on the potential problematic ramifications. By using both a quantitative and qualitative aspect to this research, both the extent and nature of the problem are analyzed.

Data Acquisition

The articles were collected using the online search engine Google. The searches were conducted using the title of the source to be studied paired with the phrase “sexual assault,” i.e. “Toronto Star sexual assault.” Although I personally see the phrase “sexual assault” as problematic, it is the legal term, common vernacular, and therefore, the greatest number of search results were returned. Once the search engines returned the results, I read through the articles making sure that they met criteria for the paper. The criteria included:

1. It must talk about a single or multiple sexualized violent act(s).
2. The articles are directly from the new sources themselves.
3. The sexualized violent act is the primary focus of the article.

There were copious amounts of articles found using that criteria, and the final selection decisions were made by choosing more recent articles over older articles. This selection process ultimately selected these five articles for each of the sources.

1. The Canadian Broadcast Corporation: (CBC News, 2017), (CBC News, 2017b), (CBC News, 2017c), (CBC News, 2017d), (CBC News, 2017e).

2. The Globe and Mail: (Globe and Mail 2016), (Globe and Mail 2017), (Globe and Mail, 2017b), (Globe and Mail 2017c), (Globe and Mail, 2017d).
3. Toronto Sun: (Toronto Sun, 2017), (Toronto Sun, 2017b), (Toronto Sun, 2017c), (Toronto Sun, 2017d), (Toronto Sun, 2017e).
4. Toronto Star: (Toronto Star, 2017), (Toronto Star, 2017b), (Toronto Star, 2017c), (Toronto Star, 2017d), (Toronto Star, 2017e).
5. Vancouver Sun: (Vancouver Sun, 2016), (Vancouver Sun, 2017), (Vancouver Sun, 2017b), (Vancouver Sun, 2017c), (Vancouver Sun, 2017d).

Data Coding

Once the 25 articles were selected, they were copied into a Word document. This was done to catalog, and to standardize the information, as well as to keep a record of the whole article in order that it was not lost in the volatile environment of the Internet.

Once the Word documents were created, content coding was done based on five categories of language: language that conceals the violence, obscures responsibility, conceals resistance, pathologizes victims, and clear language. This was done to reflect the RBP lens.

Language can be used to conceal violence, obscure and mitigate offenders' responsibility, conceal victims' resistance, and blame or pathologize victims. Alternatively, language can be used to expose violence, clarify offenders' responsibility, elucidate and honor victims' resistance, and contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims (Coates and Wade 2007, p. 513).

The level of significance in this study to a ratio as 1. This is chosen because it represents that individuals who read online news articles read an equal amount of obscured language to clear language which would represent at least some level of confusion about the topic.

Results

As I originally stated, the question that this thesis is attempting to answer is: How is language depicting sexualized violence within online news articles? and I hypothesized that there is a significant level of obscured language used.

Data

The following table represents the findings of this study. The numbers in the sections entitled CV (Conceal Violence), OR (Obscure Responsibility), CR (Conceal Resistance), PBV (Pathologize and Blame Victims), and CL (Clear Language) represent the number of times examples were found in the five articles that represent the specific news source. The numbers from the sections CV, OR, CR, and PBV were added together into the category OL (Obscured Language), as they collectively make up all the examples of obscured language found. The section NE (Number of examples) represents the number of examples of language that were found in reading the articles (Obscured Language plus Clear Language). The last section entitled Ratio was created by dividing the number of obscured examples by the number of clear language which mathematically represents a ratio of how many times obscured language is seen per example of clear language. Therefore a ratio of 9.2 (as seen in the table representing CBC) means that for every example of clear language seen, 9.2 examples of obscured language are also seen.

Table 1								
Ratios								
<u>Source</u>	<u>CV</u>	<u>OR</u>	<u>CR</u>	<u>PBV</u>	<u>OL</u>	<u>CL</u>	<u>NE</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
CBC	41	68	4	16	129	14	143	9.2
Vancouver Sun	51	11	2	5	69	28	97	2.46
Toronto Sun	34	32	1	34	101	40	141	2.52
Globe and Mail	57	48	0	15	120	29	149	4.14
Toronto Star	73	50	0	41	164	35	199	4.68
Totals	256	209	7	111	583	146	729	3.99

Inconsistencies

When we look at the data in Table 1, there were only seven examples that were counted as concealing resistance. In doing the analysis of the articles, what was clear is that the articles themselves concealed resistance. By not including victims’ acts of resistance in the news articles, the conclusion is that the news sources either assumed that there were no acts of resistance, or that resistance was not important enough to write about. This presented a challenge for this thesis as not writing about resistance made it a challenge to find either clear or obscured examples of language surrounding resistance. Therefore, although the table shows a low number in the column under concealing resistance, what this represents is that resistance was not discussed, not that it was discussed clearly.

It should be noted that although there seems to be major differences in the ratios among the different news sources (the Vancouver Sun having a ratio of 2.46 compared to CBC having a ratio of 9.2), because of the low sample size (N = 5) per news source, there may be many different external factors that play into the difference, and that it may not represent the true differences in the language, and that further and more in-depth research would be required to

make an accurate statement about this. This could possibly be an area of interest for another research project.

Data Analysis

As noted in the previous section, the level of significance for the study is a ratio of 1, as that would represent a reader reading an equal number of examples of obscure language to examples of clear language. When we look at Table 1, we see that the ratios for every news source exceeded this level (ranging from 2.46 to 9.20) which corresponded to an overall ratio of 3.99. Therefore, I can conclude that my hypothesis that there is a significant level of obscured language used is substantiated.

Language Samples and Explanations

As we move forward in our understanding of the way that language creates conceptualizations of sexualized violence, it is important to clearly define each category used in the study and show examples of how the language met and didn't meet the criteria for each category. It should be noted that the examples themselves may meet criteria for multiple categories and, in such cases, are coded in both. In this section, I will also show the example of languages' potential danger to public discourse and will suggest less problematic language.

Concealing Violence

Simply put, this category surrounds the question of "what happened." To meet criteria for this category, the language used left the reader confused by hiding the reality of the extent of the violence.

Throughout the articles what became clear is that acts of violence were often characterized as having sex and or to do with sex. Although some may choose to use such

language, this is problematic. “Hitting someone over the head is not cooking, in the same way forcing one’s lips on another is not kissing, in the same way assaulting someone with your genitals is not sex.” (L. Coates, personal conversation, March 2017). Sex is a dynamic process between two people which involves consent and therefore, if a person does not consent they are not having sex, even if the actions in the context of consent are considered sex. Such actions are best described by saying what is exactly happening or at least by using the word rape rather than sex as it illuminates the violence.

Language examples of Concealing Violence

“...and then gave her a surprise kiss on the mouth.” (CBC News, 2017c)

The first example of concealing violence in this example is the use of the word “gave” which is synonymous with the idea of a gift and something that a person wants. It is also synonymous with the idea that it was offered and then accepted by the person. Therefore, by using it within this context, “gave” creates the idea that the actions were consensual in nature and that, in fact, no violence occurred. After that, the writer of the article uses the word “surprise.” This word fundamentally erases the idea that he chose to do this in a way in which he thought he had the least opportunity to be caught by other people who would have prevented it or punished him for doing it. Presumably because the other female skiers did not know these assaults were happening to each other, this did not happen as a random surprise, but more at a time when no other skiers, officials, or anyone else was present. The next way in which language is used to conceal violence in this sentence is the idea of a “kiss”. A kiss is a dynamic consensual process between two people in which many different aspects are negotiated throughout the process. These include, but are not limited to duration, pressure, with or without tongue, who is going to turn their head in what direction, how to end. Taking this into account, a kiss is fundamentally

different than a person forcefully and non-consensually putting their mouth on another person's mouth.

An example of language that would more accurately describe the violation would be "In a moment and place where he thought that he wouldn't get caught, he forcefully placed his lips on hers." This would be followed by what she did at the time to resist it, which will be discussed in the later sections.

"I want to assure the public that we do not tolerate inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour by our officers" (Globe and Mail, 2017)

I am assuming that the point that Chief William Janes is trying to explain is that the police force does not condone having sex while on duty. They are taking the "not guilty" judgement as "there was consent" which is a fundamental error because not guilty only assumes that there was reasonable doubt about consent. They make this assumption of internally conceptualizing this as sex and using this opportunity to show that as an organization, the police have high professional and moral standards because they do not allow officers to have sex on duty. This completely conceals the violence as sex and the actions of their officer as being "inappropriate" and "unprofessional." Although these actions are inappropriate and unprofessional, the extent of the violation is completely understated and the order of magnitude is missed. When we look up the definition of these words, inappropriate is defined as "Not suitable or proper in the circumstances" (inappropriate, 2017), and unprofessional is defined as "Below or contrary to the standards expected in a particular profession" (unprofessional, 2017). Both of these words use context to justify whether or not a particular act is justified or not. This does not take into consideration that there is no circumstance, regardless of profession or social situation, in which vaginally and anally penetrating a person without their consent is justified.

Instead, I would suggest that Chief William Janes be clear in his statement as to the organization's position on sexualized violence and its position of sex on duty by saying something along the lines of "There is no circumstance in which sexualized violence can be accepted by society. We, as an organization and society, must do everything in our power to support victims". In this case, the court ruled that Constable Carl Douglas Snelgrove was innocent and that there was a reasonable doubt that this was in fact sexualized violence. "For us as an organization even with the presence of consent we do not allow officers to have sex on duty and we have taken the following actions to discipline him..."

"...some of the women had been fondled and kissed, others had been forced to perform fellatio or manual masturbation during operations that spanned 2006 to 2010." (Toronto Sun, 2017c)

In the above example, there are many words that conceal the true nature of the violent acts. First, there is the idea that using the phrase "some women did X and others did Y" in such a sentence structure does not allow for the fact that women could have been and probably were forced to do a number of different acts, meaning that they are not mutually exclusive. Second, there is the use of the word fondled; in searching through the Oxford dictionary as to the usage of the word, it was contrasted with the word groped. Fondled was defined as "Stroke or caress lovingly or erotically," (fondled, 2017) and groped was defined as "to fondle (someone) for sexual pleasure roughly or clumsily, or without the person's consent" (groped, 2017). This means that the two words are actually contrasted by consent or lack thereof. Therefore, because a person who is unconscious cannot give consent, they cannot be fondled because by its very definition that is being groped. Third, there is the idea that one could kiss an unconscious patient. As shown in a previous example, if there is no consent, you cannot actually kiss someone and it

is better defined as forcibly placing your lips on another person. Fourth, there are the words “perform fellatio”; such an idea would conceal the fact that the perpetrator, without the consent of the victim, inserted his penis in the victim’s mouth. Fifth, there is the word “masturbation”. I do not know if he inserting his fingers into her vagina, or if he made a fist with her hand and gyrated with the victim’s hand on his penis. For the reasons above, I am still unclear about who did what to whom.

Instead of the above sentence, I would suggest the following: “The doctor used his position of power and privilege to grope, force his mouth on the lips of, insert his penis in the mouth of, and force his fingers into the vagina of female patients, spanning 2006 to 2010.”

“A Toronto private school teacher pleaded guilty Thursday to sex offences involving minors and making child pornography” (Toronto Star, 2017e)

As I have previously discussed, the use of the word sex here is completely concealing the violence. Under Canadian law these minors could not consent to sex, therefore, sex cannot happen and is best described as rape. Along those lines is the completely problematic phrase “child pornography.” By using the word pornography, the phrase includes a questionable moral, but legal, word; this blurs the idea around legality. The word pornography also hides the fact that what is actually happening is that a perpetrator is using their power to make a child display their genitalia, do certain sexualized acts, and/or is raping them on film. Therefore, in order to reveal what is actually happening, such recordings would best be described as child rape pictures or child rape films. It should also be noted that it did not discuss this any further in the article, and therefore, who did what to whom is completely obscured.

Instead of the above sentence, I would suggest the following: “A private school teacher used his position of power to force his mouth upon the lips and genitals of, grope the hips,

buttocks, and breasts of, and inserted his finger in the vagina of female minor students who went to the school he taught at.”

“...children were removed from this individual’s care and the contract with the caregiver terminated. Each of the children in care who were victims in this case has been offered and provided counselling” (Vancouver Sun, 2017)

In this example, we see the word *care* being used to describe the idea of control over the children in the way in which guardians are lawfully bound to. In this case, it is using the legal definition of care which is “protective custody or guardianship provided by a local authority for children whose parents are dead or unable to look after them properly” (Care, 2017). The problem with using the word care is that it hides the reality that the children were continually being raped. That is because the idea of rape and the non-legal definition of care cannot coexist. The non-legal definitions of care are “The provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something” (Care, 2017) and “Serious attention or consideration applied to doing something correctly or to avoid damage or risk.” Therefore, by using care within the context of rape, we are combining the ideas of doing what is in the best interest of, which is avoiding harming the children, with raping them. This is also problematic when the perpetrator is described as a caregiver. Such term would suggest that he is giving care to the children. Which we know is not true because he is raping them. Using this language again conceals the violence and obscures what was happening

Instead of the above sentence, I would suggest the following: “The children were rescued from him and contract with the perpetrator terminated. The victims in this case have been offered and provided counselling”

Obscuring responsibility

The simple and yet vitally important question this category tries to answer is What and who caused the violence? To meet criteria for this category, the language used leaves the reader ultimately confused as to who is responsible for the fact that violence is unilateral. “Perpetrators often try to conceal or avoid responsibility for their actions by obscuring the distinction between victim and perpetrator, for instance, by portraying their unilateral, violent actions as mutual” (Coates and Wade, 2007, p. 513).

As I wrote in the previous section, using the word “sex” or framing the actions around that idea conceals the extent of the violence, and another problematic piece is that it also obscures the responsibility. As I previously wrote, sex is a dynamic process involving consent which is mutually understood and accepted by both or all parties. Therefore, to use the word sex, what happens is unilateral actions of violence become blurred with mutually agreed upon ideas. This is clearly shown by looking at the language surrounding the word sex versus the word rape: you have sex “with” a person or people versus you rape “a” person or people. By adding the word “with,” it becomes mutual rather than being unilateral and when it is mutual the responsibility is shared or obscured.

Language examples of obscuring responsibility

“Allegations are that the man was soliciting sex from residents, minors and adults.” (CBC News, 2017)

In this example, the two words “soliciting sex” frame the unilateral actions of the landlord into a mutually agreed upon verbal contract. This comes from both words. Soliciting is the verb “to solicit” which is defined as to “ask (someone) for something” (Soliciting, 2017). As discussed earlier, the word sex does this as well. This then means that the two parties can agree

or disagree as to whether or not something will happen. Presumably, then if it happens, then both parties consented. The first indication that this is not true is that there are minors involved. Minors, as discussed earlier, cannot consent and if they cannot consent they cannot have sex and furthermore, they then cannot be solicited for sex. The other indication that this is incorrect is that the victims brought this forward to seek justice. This would indicate that it was not solicited or asked for. An important distinction is that there is a fundamental difference between asking for and coercion; asking is defined as “say something in order to obtain an answer or some information” (Coercion, 2017), whereas coercion is defined as “the action or practice of persuading someone to do something by using force or threats.” The difference between the two is that the person responding to the request has the freedom to say no. Because the perpetrator was in a power position over the victim, such as being the landlord, or in some cases, as adult over a minor, it would be logical to think that the victims did not have the freedom to say no, thus it was either completely forced upon them, or at the very least, he used coercion to get what he wanted.

Instead of the above sentence, I would suggest the following: “The landlord used his position of power to coerce and rape the victims which included both adults and minors.” As always, I would prefer to use more detailed language as to what happened, but this was not detailed in the story.

“Defence lawyer Steven Keesic told court Wednesday the man experienced sexual abuse and neglect as a child, suffers from a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and has a low IQ” (Globe and Mail, 2017b)

In this example, causation is being blurred, essentially stating that what caused the brutal sexualized assault of two women was the perpetrator's challenging context, rather than the

perpetrator's choice. I am not arguing that the perpetrator's context is not challenging, but the ramifications of such language are problematic. If we suggest that a person's context negates their ability to make choices, we essentially claim that an individual with such challenges can never change and should be imprisoned for their entire life. Also, this does not explain why other individuals who have similar contexts do not act in such a way. It also doesn't explain how these perpetrators selected the specific time and place for the sexualized assault. Although argued in the article that this was "random," the reality is, it wasn't. We know that if we change the context and increase the likelihood of being stopped or being caught, the perpetrators wouldn't have perpetrated. For example, if a police officer was with the victims at the time of the assault or instead of it being in a remote location, it was in a courtroom, we can be fairly certain the sexualized assaults wouldn't happen. Essentially, by saying that the assaults are caused by anything other than a perpetrator's choice made by their rational, we lose the ability to explain why perpetrators choose specific contexts and victims. When we do this, we prevent perpetrators from taking responsibility for their choices which ultimately says perpetrators cannot change because they have no choice, and therefore, cannot choose to act differently.

This sentence requires a major rework in order to make this statement clarify responsibility because essentially the whole idea is problematic. I would suggest something along the lines of "Although the perpetrator grew up in a challenging context which included being a victim of sexualized assault by the hands of his uncle, being diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and scoring low on standardized IQ tests, he ultimately made the choice to repeatedly use sexualized violence that night."

"As we all know, asylum-seekers don't have the best image here in Austria." (Toronto Sun, 2017e)

I understand that what the defense, in this case, is trying to do is eliminate the possibility of political oppression against their clients. It is important to understand the macro environment within violence as it can illustrate power differentials within a society, and show political oppression and resistance which ultimately can show groups of individuals who need more support. That being said, what can easily become lost in doing so, is the fact that individuals themselves make choices to be violent. By grouping the individuals as asylum-seekers rather than individuals, as is being done in the above statement, what is happening is that a political status is, at least in part, being held responsible for the violence rather than the individuals themselves, which in turn obscures their responsibility. What quickly becomes lost by taking this lens is why some, and presumably the majority of, individuals who are asylum-seekers do not choose to use violence, and why these particular individuals chose to use violence in this particular situation, and what the victim did to resist it.

As alternative clear language, I would suggest “It is important that these individuals be held responsible for their choices to be violent, not as asylum-seekers, but as individuals.”

“Dr. Rodion Andrew Kunynetz was found guilty of professional misconduct and sexual abuse.” (Toronto Star, 2017d)

It is important to note, as I have previously written, that the words “professional misconduct” are problematic because they conceal the extent of the violence. That being said, what I want to illustrate in this example is that the author chooses to use the phrase “sexual abuse.” This term is also problematic. The root of the word “abuse” is “to use” and when the prefix “ab,” meaning “away” or “wrongly” the word is defined as “[to] Use (something) to bad effect or for a bad purpose; misuse.” (Abuse, 2017). What needs to be highlighted is that when looking at the definition, we see the word *something* rather than *someone*. This means that the

words “use” and “abuse” are appropriate when we are talking about unilateral actions a subject has on an object or objects. For example, a person can use a hammer to hit a nail. When we then use this word within the phrase “sexual abuse,” we objectify the victim and obscure responsibility by placing the unilateral word abuse alongside the mutual term sex, or as in this case, sexual. Also, the word “use” and or “abuse” takes on the idea that subjects have the right(s) to use the object. Objects do not have rights, their consent is not necessary, and most importantly they are not living. In contrast, people have rights. To further underscore this idea, people are not “used,” they are either asked and consent to the request, or they are “violated.” It should also be noted that the term sexual abuse is not a legal term for the reasons given above, as well as for the fact that it is also a vague concept.

My suggested alternative sentence would be “Dr. Rodion Andrew Kunynetz was found guilty of violating multiple female patients by pinning them against his examination table and forcibly pressing his groin against them.”

“But the sexual assaults then resumed when she would visit her family” (Vancouver Sun 4)

When the phrase “sexual assaults resumed” is used in this example, it completely erases the fact that every assault is a choice made by a perpetrator and completely removes the perpetrator as the subject of the sentence, and thus, the responsibility of the actions are obscured. What we are left with in this sentence is that visiting the family causes the violation, not the father. The reality is that the father is deliberately and continually making the choice to violate his daughter and strategically doing it in a way that he is least likely to be stopped and or punished for his actions, not the fact that she visits her family.

As an alternative to the sentence I would suggest; “The father continually chose to violate

his daughter when he had the opportunity to do so, and this continued when she visited the family home.”

Concealing resistance

“Resistance is ubiquitous: Whenever individuals are subjected to violence, they resist” (Coates and Wade 2007, p. 513). The simple and yet profound questions this section is trying to answer are: What did the victim do in response? and How are the articles representing this in their articles? The idea that resistance is the ubiquitous response to violence is a complete contrast to the public discourse idea that if the victim didn't physically fight back and prevent that violence then she didn't resist. The reason for this is that the public discourse does not consider that “Victims of violence face the threat of further violence, from mild censure to extreme brutality, for any act of open defiance. Consequently, open defiance is the least common form of resistance” (Scott, 1990 as cited in Coates and Wade, 2007, p. 513). The problem is that when the resistance is concealed or not spoken about, the discourse created is that victims are passive, victims could have done something to prevent the violence, and if they didn't resist, they may have consented.

Language examples of Concealing Resistance

“The mother said the girl and the family eventually went to police to complain about Kobylanski” (CBC News, 2017d).

In this example, the author uses the word “eventually” to illustrate that there was time between the violence and the response of reporting to the police. Although this is a valid statement and the author may be talking about the victim's resistance, what is not discussed is the ways that she resisted the violence in the period between the assault and reporting. In doing so, the author frames her response to violence in such a way that, if she did not report the

violence to the police, she ultimately did not resist at all. What is lost in the use of the word “eventually” is the logical thought pattern of the victim during the elapsed time during which she concluded that it wasn't the best option to report. It also conceals the reason why she chose that particular time to report. We know that the perpetrator continually chose to use violence, and it would be logical to assume that the perpetrator did not want the victim to report, therefore, it would also be logical to assume that the victim would fear for her safety in reporting. We as outsiders do not know the entire context, and thus, we cannot make informed judgements about what would and wouldn't be safe for her. Therefore, what becomes apparent is that rather than her being passive during the elapsed time, the reality is that she continually evaluated her safety and reported the violence when it was safe to do so, something that is not reflected in the above statement.

In order to illustrate her resistance, I would suggest the following “The daughter, alongside her family, went to the police and reported the sexualized violence when she believed it was safe to do so.”

“The witness said her relationship with Charest ended in early 1998 when two other girls told her they had also been seeing the former coach, and the matter was revealed to Alpine Canada officials.” (Globe and Mail, 2017c)

Before going into the blatant way this example conceals resistance, it should be noted that the phrase “seeing the former coach” completely conceals the ways in which he is violating the skiers, as well as mutualizing what is happening, and therefore obscures responsibility. As for concealing resistance, this example is similar to the example above in that the words conceal the ways in which the victims previously and continually resisted the perpetrator. In this particular article, what is important to understand is that the ways in which the victims resist the

violence has to be balanced with the fact that the perpetrator is the coach, and therefore a major gateway for them to continue to ski competitively. Of major importance to understanding this situation is asking: What did it mean to the victims when they found out that there were other victims and why did they then report? Without this information, the readers are left to make their own conclusions as to why the victims reported, which is dangerous to a full understanding of this particular situation. This is dangerous because without asking, understanding, and reporting the ways that the victims resisted, one conclusion as to why they chose to report is out of jealousy; the victims perhaps wanted a monogamous romantic relationship with him.

Following that logic would be the idea that because they wanted a monogamous relationship they may have consented to what happened, and therefore a jury can conclude that there is reasonable doubt and the perpetrator can be found not guilty. However, in this article (although the other does not frame it this way) we see two examples for the victims' resistance: one is the fact that they did report the sexualized violence to Alpine Canada, and two is that one victim felt so full of shame and guilt that she became ill. Although the first example of the resistance is obvious to many readers, without the lens of resistance, the second one can easily be missed. Although we cannot be certain as to how her context changed without talking to the victim, we can conclude that it did. She potentially used this to get out of the contexts in which the perpetrator violated her in the past. She could have used it as an opportunity to report the violence to someone else, she could have used it to draw other peoples' attention to the situation, or a plethora of other options that we cannot know unless we are able to speak to her directly. All we know is that the victim claims that it was due to feeling "guilt and shame" and that it did change her context. It is also important to note that the perpetrator understood this as a threat to him and made sure that if the victim was to see a physician it would be in his presence and with his father (who is a

physician.) By doing so it made it increasingly difficult, if not impossible for her to report the sexualized violence.

As an alternative sentence, I would suggest “In early 1998 after finding out that Charest had victimized two other female skiers on the team the witness reported the sexualized violence to Alpine Canada.”

“Mack said that after Thomas left, Koppenhaver turned his rage on her.” (Toronto Sun, 2017)

In this article, Christy Mack is the primary victim of violence and her resistance is not spoken about in any way. This example continues to build evidence of the idea that resistance is often concealed, in spite of the fact that the absence of any indication of resistance in the language used makes this statement challenging to evaluate. That being said, it is in the language used to describe what Corey Thomas’ (the secondary victim as written in this article) actions were that I find problematic. The author chose to use the word “left” to describe how Mr. Thomas got out of the situation. It was later in the article that we find out he received “[a] broken nose, dislocated shoulder, scrapes, bruises and bite marks.” This makes it clear that Mr. Thomas was being controlled and violated by the perpetrator, and therefore a more accurate word to describe his actions around getting out of the situation would be “escaped,” rather than “left.”

It should also be noted that the author’s word choice obscures responsibility by using the word “rage” to describe the perpetrator’s actions. The definition of rage is “violent uncontrollable anger” (Rage 2017), therefore, if it is uncontrollable, how can someone be held responsible for it? Yet we can be fairly certain that this is not the case because, as I pointed out earlier, if we change the context by say, placing ten other males in the room who would protect

her, he is not likely to choose to use violence.

As an alternative suggestion using language that would address both of these examples of problematic language I suggest “After Mr. Thomas was able to escape; the perpetrator chose to physically assault Miss Mack, causing a broken nose, missing teeth, fractured eye socket, leg injuries and a lacerated liver.”

“She testified that she felt he was starting to get an erection and she ‘could not wait until the appointment was over,’ ” the panel, chaired by Dr. Peeter Poldre, wrote. “She felt it was ‘disgusting and degrading.’ ” (Toronto Star, 2017c)

This is a clear example of leaving out exactly what the victim did to resist what was happening. We know by her account that she felt disgusted and degraded, and she wanted the appointment to be over. The logic that would follow is that she did something in order to make this happen. This would include everything from a look of disgust to ending conversations quickly with the doctor to minimize the time that they were spending together. One of the ways we know victims resist is looking at the ways in which perpetrators anticipate the resistance and act accordingly. In this example, it is also clear that the perpetrator knew that the victim was going to resist by his decision to pin her against the examination table in such a way that she could not get away. Again, as I have mentioned, this lack of talking about resistance opens the possibility that these actions were consensual even though they were clearly not. Alternatively, a clear statement would include her resistance and clearly show that nothing was consensual.

Taking that into consideration, as an alternative I would suggest something along the lines of “She felt disgusted and degraded by the doctor pushing his penis (which was under his clothes) against her and did everything in her power to stop him from doing so and ended the appointment as soon as possible.”

““I woke up to him and he was basically done,” the woman, who was 18 at the time, told court. “I was confused, I was scared. I didn’t know what to think.” ... “I couldn’t say no,” the woman shot back, raising her voice. “What do I do when I wake up with someone on top of me and I’m scared for my life? I couldn’t say anything.” (Vancouver Sun 2017c)

In this example, we see two contrasting concepts of the same situation. In the first part of the quote, the victim used the word “confused” along with the idea that she didn’t know what to think about the situation, yet in the second part of the quote it is clear this wasn’t the case. In the first part of the quote it would seem that she is showing through her confusion that she was passive, meaning she didn’t resist. In the second part of the quote, she shows that she clearly evaluated the situation and made a conscious decision that to openly defy the perpetrator by saying anything would put her in a more dangerous situation, and therefore she chose not to say anything. This illustrates one of the major fundamental errors in saying that because a victim did not say “no,” the implication is that there was consent. If a person is coerced to either not say “no” or say “yes” due to safety, she cannot consent.

As an alternative sentence I would suggest; “As she woke up to the perpetrator raping her, she didn’t say anything because she concluded that if she did, the perpetrator may become more violent.” Or to continue in the same voice “I woke up to him raping me and chose not to say anything because I thought that it wouldn’t stop him and would potentially put me in more danger.”

Pathologize and/ or Blame Victim

Although pathologizing and blaming the victim does obscure responsibility, meaning that it obscures the idea of what caused the violence; it goes beyond leaving it as an ambiguity. In such cases of problematic language, it points the cause of the offence at either an action done by

the victim, or as something about the victim that is the cause. In all instances, the fundamentally problematic assumption is that there is something the victim did, and or some way she could have been different that would have prevented the violence from happening.

Language examples of pathologize and/or blame victim.

“Court heard that McLaren was blackmailed into sending nude photos of herself after a male student who was using her phone for school purposes in class searched through her personal photos and found one of her exposed breasts.” (CBC News, 2017b)

By using the word “blackmailed” and structuring the sentence as to what the victim did to harm the perpetrator, the author not only obscures the teacher’s responsibility, but also blames the child victim. It first blames the victim for searching around on the teacher’s phone rather than blaming her for giving the student her phone with pictures of her exposed breasts on it. By explaining that the student was given the phone for school purposes, the student, therefore, broke the teacher’s trust by searching on the phone. Secondly, it also blames the student for how he handled the situation, rather than blame the teacher for her actions after the pictures were found. Ultimately, by changing who did what to whom, we see that the perpetrator’s actions begin to be justified as she becomes the victim, and therefore, her actions become a response to being oppressed herself.

To create an alternative sentence, I will restructure it to highlight the teacher’s actions, as well as add in information that we know that the author did not use. “Miss McLaren gave the student her cell phone with pictures of her exposed breasts on it. The student discovered this picture and showed it to two of his class mates. When she found out that the students had discovered the picture that she did not remove prior to lending him her cell phone, she made a deal with them to send more nude pictures of herself to them in exchange for their silence, rather

than taking responsibility for her actions by seeking legal advice.”

““One of the main reasons victims don't report crime, according to the research, is that they lack confidence in the criminal justice system,” Mr. Perrin said in an interview.” (Globe and Mail, 2017d)

By saying that the issue itself is due to a lack of confidence rather than a logical perception of how victims are treated by the criminal justice system, this sentence not only blames and pathologizes a single victim of violence, but does so to all victims. As stated in this thesis, there are many logical reasons that victims do not wish to report. To equate not reporting as being irrational or due to an internal problem with confidence is problematic. Ultimately, by placing the blame on not reporting on the victims themselves, the criminal justice system is not allowed to take responsibility for the ways that reporting can harm victims. With this lack of responsibility, many opportunities for the system to learn from its mistakes and become better at supporting victims are closed off. Yes, a “lack of confidence” in the system could be the reason victims are not reporting, but why is it that they have this lack of confidence? The questions that arise include: Why should they have confidence in the system? What is the system doing to show victims that the system is safe and that in reporting they will be continually held with dignity and respect?

As an alternative sentence, I would suggest addressing these issues: “There are many reasons that victims of violence do not report. One of these reasons is that victims know that many previous victims have been further violated by the system and therefore, they do not feel that it is safe to report.”

“Lenehan went on to note that intoxication tends to reduce inhibition and increase risk-taking behaviour.” (Toronto Sun, 2017d)

This is a clear example of the highly-contested idea of how intoxicated a person can be and still consent to sexual activity. Although this is something that is important to look at, due to it not being the focus of this thesis, I do not believe I can give justice to the intricacies of the debate. That being said, what is not highlighted at all in this sentence is any responsibility the perpetrator (the word I choose to use in this situation) has for making sure that the victim can consent, and therefore, puts all the responsibility on the victim for saying “no.” Both parties are required to make sure that the other person can consent. This article and example of language does not show this in any way. Consent boils down to continual process: people making sure each other knows all the potential risks, individuals having the freedom to refuse without negative consequences, and then agree upon sex. So, where I find the sentence problematic is that it blames the potential state of mind of the victim which was caused by her choice to drink alcohol, and it does not address the perpetrator at all. It does not ask what did the perpetrator did to make sure that the victim knew all the potential risks, nor did it ask what the perpetrator did to make sure that the victim had the opportunity to say no?

Although I cannot make the original sentence not blame the victim, in order to address this within a sentence, I would suggest, “In a state in which the victim could not control her bladder, Al-Rawi believed that she was able to consent to sexual activity.”

“The Crown failed to produce any evidence of lack of consent at any time.” (Toronto Star, 2017b)

Although the language around this sentence is clear and this thesis is based on language, this concept of lack of evidence needed to prove it was nonconsensual is so important that I have included it. As mentioned in the introduction, Canadian Law is based upon the idea that a person is not guilty until proven guilty, and that there is an important distinction between innocence and

not guilty. We take “innocence” to mean that the perpetrator did not violate the victim and “not guilty” to mean that there is not enough evidence to prove guilt. When it comes to sexualized violence, it is extremely challenging to conceptualize what evidence would look like because “open defiance is the least common form of resistance” (Scott, 1990 as cited in Coates and Wade, 2007, p. 513) and it would only be through open defiance that we would see physical evidence. For example, we would not see evidence of violence if a 125-pound woman decided that for her safety she would go limp when a 250-pound man was raping her. I acknowledge that the criminal justice system is in a challenging position and it would be wrong to convict a person without any evidence, yet it also needs to be understood that physical evidence is as rare as open defiance. The problematic public discourse that follows is the idea that if the courts did not find the perpetrator guilty, then it did not happen, rather than although it may have happened there wasn't enough evidence to prove it. This leads to a societal social response of not believing the victim, and potentially, even worse, the victim not believing themselves because there was no evidence. Because the problem exists as a concept and the language itself is clear in the original sentence, an alternative sentence will not be provided.

“The department is cautioning the public to be aware of their surroundings if using trails, especially when out of the public's view, and to report any incidents right away.” (Vancouver Sun, 2017b)

This example of language highlights a widespread problem found in our social response to victims of sexualized assault. Although warning people about potential danger can be supportive, what can be hidden in the idea is that there is something that victims can do to prevent the sexualized assault. This belief leads to a slippery slope that results in saying that because a victim didn't do X to prevent the sexualized violence, she/he is in some way to be

blamed. The cause of the violence is not that the victim was not aware of her surroundings; it is because the perpetrator chose to rape the victim and made a strategic plan which included the highest likelihood of raping the victim and least likely probability to get caught doing so.

As an alternative sentence that clearly places the responsibility on the perpetrator I would suggest, "A man who is still at large physically assaulted and raped a woman on the Galloping Goose trail near Pickford Road. The perpetrator used the cover of bushes and waited for the victim to be isolated and then chose to attack her. Please be aware that he may choose to do this again."

Clear Language

Throughout the articles are also clear pieces of language that describe the sexualized assaults in a way that clearly captures who did what to whom and/or clearly illustrates how the victim resisted the violence. In this section, the clear language samples will be shown along with a description as to why it is a clear example of language and an alternative problematic suggestion will be made in order to illustrate the difference.

Language examples of Clear Language

"...threatening to burn parts of her body..." (CBC News, 2017)

This example clearly illustrates a piece of who did what to whom. He was threatening her and forcing her to comply to his demands. This then shows why, in such an instance, the victim did not openly defy the perpetrator. Unfortunately, the author of the article did not further explain what she did do, nor did the court ask what she did. That being said, it is a clear example of why we cannot make judgements about the responses of victims without context.

Three alternative problematic examples could be: "The victim feared for her safety" (concealing the violence), "the victim was in an abusive relationship that resulted in sexual

abuse” (obscuring responsibility by pointing to the relationship rather than to the perpetrator), or “The woman felt unsure about the foul play in the relationship” (concealing the violence by calling it foul play, obscuring the responsibility by pointing to the relationship, and pathologizing the woman for being in the relationship).

“The facts themselves are utterly horrific. ... The man held her down while Hudson sexually assaulted [raped] her. She ended up in the Assiniboine River, crawled out 100 metres downstream and was attacked again with a hammer. ... A passerby found her hours later. She was technically dead for 45 minutes before being revived in hospital” (Globe and Mail, 2017b)

The level of violence in many cases of sexualized violence is horrific and as shown in the section on concealing violence, many authors do not include the details of the assault in the description. Although the details are still not described in this example, what is blatantly clear is that the level of violence was so brutal that she was technically dead for 45 mins. It should also be noted that although as a whole the sentence is an example of clear language, I used the square brackets to point out where a suggestion could be made to make the language even more clear.

Three alternative problematic examples could be: “The women were sexually assaulted and sustained some injuries” (Concealing the violence by using the phrase some injuries which minimizes them), “The women were sexually assaulted and went to the hospital where their injuries were treated” (Concealing the violence by saying the injuries were completely treatable, neglecting the psychological violence they faced as well as not mentioning the amount of time that will be required to recover, obscuring the responsibility by not talking about what the perpetrator did, as well as completely removing the victims’ resistance of fighting to stay alive), or “the hospital treated two women who had been sexually assaulted after being out late at night” (concealing the magnitude of the violence, obscuring responsibility and pathologizing them for

being out late at night”).

“While undergoing a hysterectomy, she recalls her anesthesiologist forcing his penis into her mouth and assuring her that he was discreet.” (Vancouver Sun, 2017c)

This is a clear example of who did what to whom. The sentence structure uses the perpetrator as the subject and clearly describes his actions. The first piece of the sentence illustrates the power differential in the context as this was done when she was undergoing a surgical procedure in which she was sedated, therefore, there was little she could do to resist. That being said, the sentence also uses the word “forcing” to indicate that the victim resisted the action and that it was, in no way, consensual. Unfortunately, although this was described well in this paragraph, in the next paragraph it was described as “forced to perform fellatio” which I have already discussed earlier as problematic in the concealed violence section.

Three alternative problematic examples could be: “The doctor placed his penis in the mouth of the women” (concealing the violence and resistance by using the word placed rather than forced), “During surgery the woman was sexually assaulted” (Obscures the responsibility by not talking about the actions and choices of an individual), or “The woman performed oral sex on the doctor” (Concealing the violence by calling it sex, obscuring the responsibility because sex is a mutual act, and concealing resistance by removing the word forced and the implied idea that she was trying to prevent it).

“Holmes said the video shows someone pulling the girl to a bed as she struggled to get away.” (Toronto Star, 2017).

This example of language was chosen as it illustrates an article bringing light to the ways that the victim was resisting. In doing so, it is clear that none of the behaviors are consensual and that the perpetrators are using their position of power in the situation to violate the victim. It

also uses the phrase “a person pulling the girl” rather than the girl was pulled, which also highlights that it was a choice made by and action done by a person.

Three alternative problematic examples could be: “The video showed the girl was pulled into bed” (Obscuring responsibility by not attributing a person to the actions of pulling), “The video showed the girl was in bed with a boy” (Concealing the violence of pulling her into bed, obscuring the responsibility by implying she wanted to be in the bed because she wasn't resisting it), or “The video showed the girl hanging out with a group of boys in a bed.” (Concealing the violence of being pulling in to the bed, obscuring responsibility, and pathologizing the victim by using the phrase hanging out).

“She started to wear a vest to lessen the impact of the fondling [him groping her] ... She never told him to stop because she was scared he would hurt her.”(Vancouver Sun, 2017d)

This is another example found in an article that clearly articulates why the victim did use open defiance and at the same time illustrates what she did do. This clearly shows that the victim responded in a contextually relevant, strategic, and logical way to the actions of the perpetrator. This is an example that goes against the public discourse that victims are passive unless they choose open defiance and although the problematic word “fondling” was used which was illustrated earlier, it was an important example to highlight.

Three alternative problematic examples could be: “Fondling occurred during the girl's piano lessons” (Concealing the violence by using the word fondling, obscuring responsibility by using the word occurred, and concealing resistance by not including it [which will also be done in the rest of the examples]), “The girl did not tell the teacher that the fondling that occurred in the piano lessons should stop” (Concealing the violence by again using fondling and blaming the victim for not telling the piano teacher to stop), or “Authorities were not informed immediately

about the fondling that occurred during the piano lessons” (Concealing the violence by using fondling and obscuring the responsibility by blaming the victim for not reporting).

Discussion

Simply put, the purpose of this study is to examine the social context that faces survivors of sexualized assault. Based on the ideas of behavioral science, people's behaviors are primarily based on the consequences of their actions. Therefore, before we can judge whether reporting is positive for the victim, we must understand the social context of victims.

The research question that this thesis addressed is: How is language within online news articles depicting sexualized violence? The purpose is not to vilify the media; the hope is that through careful analysis of the language used to depict sexualized violence through a RBP lens, the state of the language will be seen clearly. The hope is that in illuminating the problematic language used by the media it can create a possibility for changes which would create a more supportive public discourse surrounding victims of sexualized violence. In creating a more supportive public discourse, victims of sexualized violence would be able to get more support, and ultimately, a system that truly supports victims could be created. It should be noted that as was written in the introduction, the hope in reporting is not that victims would necessarily seek more legal support, only that they would be able to be supported in the way they wish. This is because society needs to continually be sensitive to the wishes and desires of victims, as many victims do not necessarily want to punish the perpetrator, they just want the violence to stop.

To understand the state of the language that has been used in the media to depict sexualized violence, this thesis took five popular online news sources and analyzed the language within the articles using a RPB lens. This was done through repeatedly looking through the articles and making judgements about whether the language is obscured meaning that it conceals

violence, obscures responsibility, conceals the victim's resistance and/or pathologizes/blames the victim, or whether the language is clear, meaning that it doesn't do any of those. To make sure the data was valid, the process was repeated multiple times checking whether or not the same conclusions about the data were made. After all the data was collected, a simple ratio was created that highlighted the level of problematic language found.

To make a judgment about the level of problematic language the media uses, this thesis set the threshold at a ratio of 1, meaning that there is 1 example of obscured language per example of clear language. At this level, readers read an equal number of examples of clear and problematic language. After analyzing the data this study found the ratio to be 3.99 meaning that it was 4 times the ratio that was set as a threshold. Therefore, we can conclude that the level of obscured and problematic language is of major concern.

This thesis then took examples of the language that were found in the online newspapers and showed the problematic ways that language has been used in the depiction of sexualized violence. After that was done, other examples of clear language were shown which ultimately showed how changing small pieces of language depict the violence in a completely different way.

The potential ramifications of obscured and problematic language are massive, because of their implications on both the public discourse, as well as on the other victims of sexualized violence. As shown through the results section, the language that was used often concealed violence, obscured responsibility, concealed resistance and pathologized/blamed the victim. As noted previously, language has a major implication in the ways that people perceive their context. In this case, problematic language creates a public discourse where the perception of sexualized violence is that it is: not as violent by concealing the violence, not the choice of the

perpetrator by obscuring responsibility, victims allow it to happen by concealing their resistance and that it may have actually cause by the victim themselves by blaming and pathologizing them. All of these perceptions place the victim into a position that, in many cases, is more logical not to report the violence than to report it. It is then, no wonder, that as discussed in the introduction, less than ten percent of the time victims do report, and furthermore, if we are truly seriously about supporting victims of violence, this needs to be addressed.

As mentioned earlier, it is not the intention of this thesis to vilify the media or authors of the online news articles, as in many cases they are just reporting the language that has been used in the court cases, as well as using many terms that are used in common vernacular. Also, the unique ways that RBP looks at language is a complete paradigm shift and one that is not widely known. It should be noted that the author of this thesis predominately used problematic language before studying RBP, and although it is his goal to not use problematic language, he finds himself using it from time to time.

This suggested change in language could be the start of a paradigm shift in the media's language from pathologizing, blaming, questioning the character of the survivor, and furthering the pain that survivors go through, to language that upholds dignity, illustrates their resistance, and holds perpetrators responsible for the actions.

As mentioned earlier, this thesis is a response to a call to action to assess the extent of the four discursive operations in language found in (Coates and Wade, 2007) and is only intended to be seen as part of a number of pieces of research that are coming together as a whole to illustrate both the ubiquity and potential harm cause by this problematic language. I believe that it is important to continue to use both qualitative and quantitative research to continue analyze this subject as a whole. To my knowledge, this is the only piece of research that has used a

quantitative measure, thus I believe that more quantitative research is required. I also believe that although I have found some differences in the uses of language within different online news sources, the number of subjects (N=5) per source did not allow for any conclusions to be made as the margin of error with such low subjects is too great. Further research in this area may indicate major differences within the sources which could indicate the possibility of news sources to learn from each other.

There one major bias that is important to report in this research; it is my personal and professional bias is that I agree with the RBP that violence is social and unilateral, violence is deliberate, and resistance is ubiquitous (Coates and Wade, 2007, p. 513). This bias has major implications on the way that I interpret the violent actions as well as the language used to depict it. This bias means that I believe that all violence is ultimately caused by the choices made by the perpetrator, and that although in most acts of sexualized violence victims are not able to prevent or stop the violence, victims always resist violence in a contextually relevant way.

I also believe that this study has three major limitations which are important to examine. The first limitation is that I did not make a distinction between articles that are written about cases that found the perpetrator guilty or not. Due to the new sources obligation to be neutral and fear of being sued for slander, it may be interesting to look at the ways that language changes. I cannot make any judgment about this as it goes beyond the scope of this research, yet this may be a key factor in the language. The second limitation is that the quantitative data acquisition was solely done by myself and many judgements had to be made about the language. However, in order to address this limitation, I repeated this process multiple times. Because it was the same person analyzing the examples, who I am played a major role in the data. In order to address this in further research I believe that it would be important to have multiple readers

reading through the news articles. The third limitation is that this research solely looked at online news articles and no other forms of the media, thus, to make judgements on other aspects of the media is somewhat problematic. In order to address this in the future, other research could branch out in to other forms of media in order to see if other forms are different. Even with my bias and the limitations I believe that this is an important piece of research which highlights both apparent abundance of problematic language within online news articles, as well as the danger associated with it.

As we know, although tortured, humiliated, and dehumanized, many individuals who experience sexualized violence remain silent. I do understand that it is only through our great effort and continued collaboration that we are able the change the systems around us. I believe that we, as a society, should do everything within our power to both understand and address the issues. It is out of this belief that this piece of research was created. It is only through truly listening to victims' desires and developing a better social response that we should expect victims to be more likely to report. Although I am not naive to the fact that even if we changed our language many of these problems in reporting will still exist, I do believe that it is an important piece to address as it is a major contributor into our public discourse, and therefore to our response to victims of sexualized violence. My dream is that if we have a positive social discourse and response in which victims of sexualized assault find sanctuary in reporting, victims will more likely seek support and ultimately be in a much safer situation.

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