

Prioritizing The Victim Over The Story:
Conservative Media Coverage Vs. Liberal Media Coverage Of Sexual Violence In The United
States Of America

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Being a twenty-something woman is an odd experience. Growing up, I was taught that I needed to be careful when I went out into the world on my own. I remember learning all about stranger danger and that there are bad people all over the place. For the most part, news media completely backed up that information. Every tragedy involving young women seemed to have the same framework. A woman was walking home late at night, was suddenly attacked by a stranger, and was violently assaulted. She had been drinking and was wearing revealing clothes and that is why she was attacked. This is what I feared. This is what I watched out for.

It wasn't until I was 20 years old that I realized this is not what sexual violence looks like most of the time. This is not how it will always happen. But my entire understanding of sexual violence, who it happens to, what it looks like, what a victim looks like, and what a perpetrator looks like all were formed by what I was exposed to in news media. I chose to do this research because I believe that the way the media currently portrays and reports on sexual violence is harmful to readers and victims.

The media are one of the most powerful influences when it comes to shaping public perceptions about crime and victimization (Chermak, 1995; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002) and the framing of gender and violence. In fact, there is a direct correlation between the time spent consuming mass media information and acceptance of its images and stereotypes. The media frames what we see as social problems, who is a legitimate victim, what is good and bad, etc.

Journalists' voices matter, and the way they talk about and present issues has a significant impact on the views and beliefs of readers. This study will bring light to the ways that political preference potentially impacts the way that sexual violence is covered. By studying the differences between liberal and conservative media coverage of sexual violence and examining

the ways the current practices have been harmful or helpful, this study aims to determine the best way for all journalists to report on sexual violence—a way that is respectful, accurate, and appropriate to victims and readers.

RQ1: What are the major similarities and differences in the coverage of sexual violence between conservative and liberal news publications?

RQ2: In what ways is the coverage harmful or helpful to readers and victims?

RQ3: How can all journalists better cover sexual violence in an appropriate and respectful way?

Professional Component

Over the summer as part of the completion of my professional project, I worked 30 hours a week for The Crossing, a Presbyterian church in Columbia that lead to a full-time position now that I have completed my masters. The role I was given is the digital relationships strategist for the church's college ministry, Veritas. I previously interned for Veritas in assisting the former digital relationships specialist and was promoted to take over that position in June of 2022. The new role gave me a lot more responsibility within the ministry. My job consisted of creating graphic design, photo, video, and website content for Veritas. I took over running all social platforms for the ministry as well. On top of my visual responsibilities, I was also responsible for running a team of student leaders in which I delegated assignments, taught them new skills, and held weekly meetings with them to go over new projects and goals for the week. I was also expected to attend and present at weekly staff meetings, help plan and set up any events or trips we were taking, attend all staff monthly meetings, and take on new administrative responsibilities. Part of having a full-time position at The Crossing meant I was be responsible for, what they call, support raising. The reason the church is able to employ so many people is

through the concept of raising our salary. This is a big responsibility at the start of a new job at The Crossing. I was given the task of recruiting a support team who would support the ministry and give financially. It was required that I raise \$2,000 per month at the least. Once my support team was fully recruited, I would send regular updates to supporters about the ministry, meet with existing supporters, and be recruiting new supporters throughout the year.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Why News Media Coverage of Sexual Violence is an Issue of Relevance

The portrayal of sexual violence in news media has contributed to its normalization in society. This is because the media acts as a socializing agent for social behaviors (Egen et al., 2020). The medias portrayal of all issues, not just sexual violence, have shown to influence, reinforce, or modify the way that audiences react and respond to those issues. Society has a warped understanding of the frequency of sexual violence, who is affected by this crime, what it truly looks like, and the impact journalistic writing of sexual violence has on survivors which has led to reports of sex crimes being a normalized part of the daily paper (Carter, 1998).

What gets published in the media all comes down to: What is the most entertaining to read about? What is the most dramatic story I can tell? Journalists have created a “hierarchy of crime” to help them identify what should be reported on and what isn’t considered newsworthy. Of all the crimes, murder is considered to be the most serious offense and is therefore the priority for news coverage. But when we look at police report statistics, murder, specifically homicide, is the rarest crime to be reported. The frequency of sexual violence isn’t reflected in journalistic writing (Carter, 1998). Considering that reporting the rarest crimes aligns with the definition of news, this doesn’t seem to be an issue. Within the literature, Carter discusses that journalists’ role of informing the public is hindered when coverage isn’t consistent with the frequency of crime. The reasoning behind this is that the news coverage doesn’t exemplify the severity of sexual violence in society, and therefore readers don’t understand how common and impactful it truly is.

Not only does the type of crime determine what is considered newsworthy, but so does the type of victim. “Women who are raped or battered or even murdered appear to be

journalistically unimportant unless they are white and middle class or if they can serve as a warning to other women” (Meyer, 1997). This relates to an idea called the Ideal Victim. There are six characteristics one must possess to be labeled as an ideal victim in any criminal situation. He or she must be 1) weak, 2) blameless, 3) currently carrying out a noble task, 4) was harmed by forces or people of evil nature, 5) the people or forces aren’t able to be identified, 6) the victim can effectively claim victim status (Christie, 1986). When it comes to being an ideal victim of sexual violence, we see the characteristics are even more specific and harder to meet. The ideal victim of sexual violence of any kind is 1) young, 2) white, 3) female, 4) upper middle-class, 5) attacked by a stranger, 6) doesn’t struggle with addiction, poverty, or any mental illness, 7) of sober mind at the time of the crime, 8) a virgin, 9) wears modest clothes, and 10) has no criminal record. This image allows society to question the history and decision making of any victim that doesn’t fit this mold (Rodriguez, 2021).

Misrepresentation of sexual violence not only hurts the male and female readers’ understanding of sexual violence at large, but it also damages how women view their safety and how they should behave in order to avoid these more extreme situations that truly aren’t as common as women believe (Carter, 1998 et al). These more extreme forms of sexual violence that are more commonly reported on include serial rape, multiple perpetrator/gang rape, stranger rape, and blitz sexual assault. The reality is that the most common form of sexual violence is acquaintance rape and makes up over 80% of all reported rapes (Marshall University, 2022). The stories of sexual violence we report on create an environment of fear and disruption (Aroustamian, 2019). All cases of sexual violence are serious and relevant, and journalists are putting one specific and extreme type of situation on a pedestal for the world to see at the expense of de-legitimizing other common and relevant types of sexual violence (Carter, 1998).

The crimes that occur at a higher frequency are seen as familiar and mundane according to a study done by David Pritchard and Karen D. Hughes (1997). But when a crime as severe as forms of sexual violence happens so frequently that it is seen as mundane, that is a serious issue. What makes the crime so devastating is the toll it has on the victim, the aftermath of the crime, as with other severe crimes. Choosing to not report on sexual violence because it has become too familiar and predictable creates the risk of keeping individuals in the dark about the ways they are unknowingly experiencing sexual violence themselves. It is journalists' job to inform and educate the public to the best of their ability, but one study found that 60% of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence did not originally label it as such. This isn't including men who have unknowingly experienced sexual violence.

The way journalists write about sexual violence cases has lasting effects not only on readers but on victims. Sexual violence has the ability to leave short- and long-term effects on survivors — things like anxiety, depression, shame, and shock, as well as medical costs and legal expenses. There is a lack of consistency in the language American journalists use and the meaning of words that are regularly implemented in cases of sexual violence (Aroustamian, 2019). The language chosen by journalists is being consumed by a very easily influenced public.

Framing Theory

Framing deals with the content of media coverage and how different ways of reporting the same issue can result in different responses rather than just the effects of media coverage (Chong & Druckman). Media tend to draw the public eye to specific topics that they report on. Then the attention is taken a step further to create a frame through which the audience will comprehend the story, to give the story more meaning. These frames can be found within key

words, metaphors, concepts, symbolism, and even images (Arowolo, 2017). When it comes to sexual violence in the media, framing theory influences the audience's understanding and beliefs of the situation and the way a reader responds.

Audience understanding is affected by ways of framing by media. One way is through the inclusion and exclusion of information (Chong & Druckman). Journalists have the power to decide what information should and should not be shared with the public. Because of this, readers understanding of the material being presented is mostly up to journalists. For example, if a journalist excludes the fact that a perpetrator has two additional rape allegations against him in an article about him allegedly raping a woman, that will drastically change the readers' understanding of the situation. It is important that the information selected to be included in journalistic articles are relevant to the case and are not going to give the readers an excuse to blame the victim. Another way that framing by the media impacts audience understanding is through what is more prominently presented in the media. This is used with political candidates or issues a lot, but it is also used in crime reporting (Arowolo, 2017). As discussed earlier, not only are certain types of crimes prioritized, but so are certain types of victims (Meyers, 1997). The constant exposure of young white women being raped by a stranger frames the audience's understanding of sexual violence. This shapes their belief of who can be a victim of sexual violence and who can be a perpetrator.

Part of framing theory is the language journalists choose to use in their writing and the image they create of the people involved. Language has a significant impact on reader response (Chermak, 1995; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002). Throughout tons of sexual violence stories in the media there is use of suggestive language (Aroustamian, 2019). These simple and overused words shape victims into liars. The media tend to excessively use words like "allegedly" or

“claimed.” At first glance, these words are simply commonly used language in criminal news coverage. What needs to be taken into consideration is that these two words specifically imply a sense a disbelief of survivors from the reporter’s perspective. The same goes for words like “accusers” instead of survivor. This gives the implication that the survivor is doing something wrong to the perpetrator. Lastly, the terms “engaging in” and “sex scandal” are used far too often when reporting on sexual violence (Aroustamian, 2019). These phrases take the crime and lessen it down to a casual issue (Chong & Druckman). Some researchers have even gone as far to say that this language sensationalizes it and turns it into the latest drama that readers should be keeping up with (Arowolo et al.). When journalists imply blame in any way, whether they intend to or not, this has a significant impact on the way readers respond to situations and the beliefs they develop about the situation and the people involved. There was a study done by Palazzolo and Roberto that said message content has the ability to elicit emotions in a predictable way. This means that journalists generally have the ability to choose how they want their readers to respond and react to certain news by strategically selecting what information they want to be shared. This study relates directly to the inclusion and exclusion of information. Results of this study found that when participants knew more about the perpetrators background — where they are from, what they do for a living, if they have children, where they attended school, any humanistic information — they more often expressed sympathy towards the perpetrator. On the other hand, participants who were exposed to information designed to increase perpetrator responsibility were more likely to blame the perpetrator and hope for punishment. The same can be assumed for readers’ opinions of victims and survivors. When journalists frame the victim by including unnecessary information like their clothing choice, where they were when they were

attacked, if they had been drinking, if they fought for their life or not, this plays a serious role in the overall image of victims (Rodriguez, 2021).

It is important to note that framing can be used to rally people together around issues like racism, xenophobia, ideological extremism, and other values. Journalists desire, to an extent, the solidification of the public's opinion to create unity amongst communities. Framing is always present in journalistic writing; however, it can be expected that as active engagement and interest of the public increases, the effects of framing by the media decreases (Chong & Druckman).

Determining Political Affiliation of Publications

When looking at various publications across the United States, some have a more obvious political leaning than others. There are many resources that have taken the liberty of identifying some more well-known publications political affiliation. For example, some right leaning publications include *The Public Interest*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Des Moines Register*, and *The Las Vegas Review Journal*. Some of the left leaning publications include *The Los Angeles Times*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *The Denver Post*, and *The Baltimore Sun* (Altschiller, 2016). The political leaning of the above candidates was primarily based on of the 2020 general election endorsements. When the publication chose not to endorse a candidate, the political affiliation was then based on the analysis of news stories from that publication and the political leanings reflected from them conducted by Boston University.

Another tool for determining political bias of media sources is through All Sides. All Sides bases its findings on an editorial review of a news outlets' homepage, headlines, recent articles, photos, and other content from the previous six months. It conducts Blind Bias Surveys to determine the political affiliation of publications (All Sides, 2022). All Sides factors in survey

participants' own political bias when calculating the survey results. Survey participants are asked to identify what they feel is the political leaning of certain publications and headlines. The average political rating from the survey participants is deemed the publication's political standing in the results. All Sides also uses independent research, third-party data, and community feedback in determining the political affiliation of publications. This website is used and trusted by universities like the University of Michigan and can be found on its library website.

For the publications that are not entirely clear on their political leanings, there are some criteria that can aid in determining the political stance of publications. Boston University has studied the placement of events in print media, editorial columns published, and what stories they choose to report on of different major publications around the United States. Based on this information, Donald Altschiller was able to solidify a list of publications and where they stand politically. If political affiliation is still unclear, I also can look into who is sponsoring the publication. Are they looking to share information or to influence social or political change? If they are seeking to influence change, is that change more in line with a Republican or Democratic viewpoint (City Colleges of Chicago, 2011).

One final piece of advice when determining political leaning of United States publications comes from L. Brent Bozell III. He said, "If the paper never met a conservative cause it didn't like, it's conservative. If the paper never met a liberal cause it didn't like, it's liberal." This seems obvious but is a good reminder of how simple it can potentially be to determine the political leaning of a publication.

Existing Studies and Resources on Covering Sexual Violence in the Media

There are a number of studies and resources that can be examined to help journalists better cover stories of sexual violence in a more respectful and positively impactful way. Currently, newspapers often use euphemisms to describe sexual violence in their writing. First, why do journalists approach sources for sensitive stories? By using direct sources, journalists make the story into an account of human experience (Healey, 2020). Instead of it being information all relayed from police reports, we humanize the victim involved. Approaching sources allows journalists to get more information and more accurate answers because they are able to verify the facts they have been given. This is so important because even the smallest mistake or misinformation in these kinds of stories can cause major distress (Layman, 2020). By approaching sources, journalists are giving control to the families and victims involved. They are allowed to decide what they want included in the story. A lot of times, victims feel like they have very little control of the situation once they have reported the crime. By giving them the final say in what goes into the story, they are given back some of the control they feel they lost and gives them a sense of comfort (Healey, 2020).

When approaching, journalists should always come prepared and make sure they know the basic information and facts about the case they are covering. They should approach people gently and compassionately and keep an open mind about the people they talk to; people tend to respond differently than they normally would when they have experienced a traumatic event. Make sure to acknowledge and apologize for what they are having to go through (Healey, 2020).

Trauma reporter Lucy Williamson provides insight to journalists through her first-hand experience. The first thing she says is that it is crucial that journalists understand that people should always be prioritized over stories. That is their physical, mental, and emotional well-being should not be put at risk for the sake of publishing this story. Journalists should trust their

instincts as a human being. Journalists should know what feels right and wrong and trust that they are making the ethical and humane decision. One way to help make this process easier for both journalist and victim is to take the time to connect with them on a personal level before diving into any interviews. This makes the interviewee feel more comfortable talking about their situation. Another way to make subjects more comfortable is to select an interview location that they are familiar with and that has some privacy. Give them space when they are sharing. Don't pry too much, often times the information that is most valuable will naturally come up if you allow them to tell you their story in their own time. Lastly, avoid over-promising to the subject in terms of the impact you will have and the involvement you will have in their life (Healey, 2020).

When writing the physical story, mind your language. Journalists should never oversimplify the situation or make any assumptions about survivors or perpetrators. It should always be verified if the subject would like to be referred to as a victim or a survivor before writing their story, and it should also be verified if they would like their name to be used or excluded from the story. Lastly, if it is possible, try to include a helpline in the piece somewhere and consider including a trigger warning at the beginning of the writing as a courtesy to other survivors (Healey, 2020).

CHAPTER 3: PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS

Methodology

This study uses structured interviews from a neo-positivist perspective to reveal information about the ways publications of varying political affiliations report on sexual violence. A neo-positivist perspective seeks to find participants beliefs, perspectives, opinions, and attitudes concerning sexual violence media coverage (Roulston, 2010). Interviewing current professional journalists will provide the study with up to date and relevant information to analyze and interpret. The interviews being conducted will be structured; every interviewee will be asked the same set of predetermined questions. Using a structured interview will keep my own personal bias to a minimum when interviewing journalists with a different political affiliation than myself. Five current journalists participated in the study: four from liberal publications and one from a conservative publication. Some of the journalists currently at liberal publications have also had experience working for conservative publications in their career. Each journalist is currently working at a news publication and has received a bachelor's degree at minimum.

Alex Swoyer: Alex received her Bachelor of Journalism from the University of Missouri – Columbia and her J.D. from Ave Maria School of Law. She began her career as an anchor and reporter for the Washington Times. She later became a political correspondent for Breitbart News Network. Currently, she works in legal affairs for the Washington Times, which as been labeled a Conservative publication by All Sides and Alex Swoyer herself.

Shelly Bradbury: Shelly received her Bachelor of Journalism from Huntington University. Her career began as a business and crime reporter for the Chattanooga Times Free Press. She later became a crime reporter for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Most recently, Shelly works for the Denver Post as a breaking news and courts reporter. The Denver Post has been labeled a liberal publication by Boston University.

Evan Allen: Evan received her bachelor's degree in writing, literature, and publishing from Emerson College. She has been a reporter for the Boston Globe for over 11 years writing deeply reported longform articles on crime, courts, and the opioid crisis. She has also done investigative, breaking news, and crime reporting. The Boston Globe has been labeled a liberal publication by All Sides.

Eric Ferkenhoff: Eric received his bachelor's degree in history, English, and political science from the University of Kansas. He has worked for The City News Bureau of Chicago, The Chicago Tribune, ABC Chicago, The Boston Globe, and The Des Moines Register. Currently he is a Midwest criminal justice reporter at Gannett USA Today Network, which has been labeled a liberal publication by All Sides.

Annie Sweeney: Annie received her Bachelor of Journalism from the University of Missouri and a Master of Philosophy from the Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin. Her career began as a reporter for the Daily Southtown. She later became a reporter for the Chicago Sun-Times and remained there for 10 years. Currently, she is a general assignment

reporter for the Chicago Tribune and has been working there for over 13 years. The Chicago Tribune has been labeled moderate by All Sides and Conservative by Boston University.

How often is sexual violence covered by your publication?

It was challenging to get a solid answer of how often sexual violence is covered by each publication. Answers were all over the place, but most journalists claimed to cover it relatively often. All five journalists hinted towards the idea that sexual violence isn't covered proportionally to the rate that it happens, and some even went as far to say it needs to be covered more often.

Alex Swoyer stated that there is no specific reporter assigned to cover sexual violence at the Washington Times and therefore it is very rarely covered at the publication. It was interesting to hear that the Washington Times didn't have a reporter whose beat reached to cover the topic of sexual violence. It is worth noting that when I was looking for journalists at conservative publications that I could reach out to, I had a difficult time finding journalists who have a focus on crime and justice, public safety, or police departments/law enforcement. When I did find a reporter with a beat that fit in the category I was looking for, they often had another focus like sports, business, finance, or they no longer write for that particular beat. I found it a lot easier to find qualified reporters from liberal publications. It seemed like there was an abundance of criminal justice and public safety reporters to choose from at liberal publications.

Eric Ferkenhoff had quite a bit to say about the frequency of sexual violence coverage, and even stated, "But it's an issue that needs to be covered more, I would say. Because it's so rampant, and a lot of victims don't come forward. Sexual violence against men, women, boys,

girls, what have you, especially transgender, and so forth. So, it needs to be covered more often,” (Ferkenhoff, 2022).

What factors determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?

There were some significant commonalities among answers to this question. Those commonalities included things like if well-known or powerful people are involved in the case, if the victim dies as a result of the attack, if the case currently impacts the public, or if the story has something unusual about it that makes it stand out from others. If the public wouldn't find it interesting or it doesn't concern them, chances of the story being covered are slim to none.

These findings reflected the information I gathered in the literature portion of this study. The majority of publications are dedicating their time to other stories that have been deemed more relevant, or they are highlighting the same kinds of sexual violence stories we see consistently in the media. Those stories are stranger attacks in public areas that resulted in the death of the victim or included someone well-known in the story.

Annie Sweeney discussed how the Chicago Tribune is found covering of cases of gun violence far more regularly than sexual violence. This is not because gun violence happens more often than sexual violence, but because it is more notable to the public and an issue of relevance to the majority of the public. Sweeney stated that newsworthiness is often dictated by the response of the criminal justice system. Whatever the justice system is focused on and concerned about will determine what is covered by the Chicago Tribune, and sexual violence is often not the topic of discussion compared to gun violence. This in no way means that the criminal justice system doesn't find sexual violence to be a serious issue.

Bradbury and Ferkenhoff both noted that the age of the victim is another factor that determines if a story is newsworthy, especially if the case involves a child or a minor. One thing that the majority of people have in common is that a child being the target of a crime catches their attention. It brings a different level of grief and shock to an audience that increases the newsworthy value of any story.

Are you given any editor guidelines for a sexual violence story?

All but one publication had editor guidelines but were either not allowed to share them, or they couldn't remember most of them off the top of their head. The general consensus from all publications was to use your common sense and be respectful when writing stories about sexual violence. It would be great if we could assume all journalists have common sense, but it is better to be overprepared. In this case, journalists should be given specific guidelines or training when covering a topic as sensitive as sexual violence. The guidelines should also be memorable to journalists as this is something that is happening constantly, and we can never be sure when this kind of story will need to be written.

Evan Allen was able to remember a few guidelines that she felt were most important. Allen said that when writing about sexual violence you can't be too graphic in the story. This can be re-traumatizing for the survivor or for other survivors and isn't always necessary for the public to know. You also need to be careful not to sensationalize the story because this is a tragedy. It shouldn't be provoking any sort of excitement or be written with any intentional dramatization.

One thing that most interviewees mentioned at some point during their interview was the importance of being sensitive and careful to not retraumatize survivors. In some interviews, this

came up multiple times when talking about the involvement of the victim in the release of the story, the information included in the story, and when discussing if the method of coverage is harmful or helpful to victims and the public.

What language is typically used or avoided when writing these stories?

There is no set policy at the majority of publications for deciding what language can or cannot be used in sexual violence stories. Similar to guidelines of what should and should not be in sexual violence stories, language used in these stories is determined by the journalist, not by a standard set by the publication.

Bradbury and Allen both discussed the importance of using words like accused and alleged when writing about sexual violence. The two journalists explained that these terms are used for legal purposes to protect the publication, journalist, and survivor from a potential lawsuit. “The public misunderstands the word alleged. And they take it to mean that the reporter doesn't believe the person they're discussing. But alleged is a very important word that protects us all from a libel suit [depending on the context of the situation]. So, the idea that we wouldn't use alleged because it hurts people's feelings is like, that's just not very savvy. Because that's not how it works” (Allen, 2022). The use of these terms can be challenging because of the way they are interpreted by the public and survivor, but there are other words — like using “said” instead of “claimed” — that Allen uses to ensure that survivors feel heard and validated.

Survivor language was discussed amongst the majority of journalists in these interviews. Three of the four journalists use survivor language whenever possible in sexual violence stories. Survivor has become a preferred label for many individuals who have experienced sexual violence. The best way to determine if you should use victim or survivor is to ask which is

preferred by the subject. Bradbury said that she uses the term “victim” because it is the clearest to the audience. However, if the victim specifies that they would like to be called something else, she respects their wishes. Bradbury explained that she will typically use the language that is found in the reports or studies that she is writing about for consistency purposes and legal accuracy.

Eric Ferkenhoff discussed the importance of being specific about what the alleged perpetrator is being charged with and the type of sexual assault being reported. This is important for legal purposes and truthfulness of the story. There are so many different types of sexual violence and if we aren’t specific, then we aren’t being entirely truthful to the public. However, there is a fine line that goes along with being specific, because being specific does not mean being graphic. Certain language in a story can very easily conjure up an image that will be tied to that victim. This is especially important in situations where the victims come forward.

How involved is the victim in the release of the story?

In any situation, the victim almost never has a say in whether the story is going to be published because the information in these stories is seen as something that is for the greater good of the public. All journalists interviewed agreed that every effort should be made to contact the victim in some way whether that be directly, through a family member, or through their lawyer. One reason to contact a victim is to get their perspective of what happened. Victims may have additional information that wasn’t available in the police reports that can help to further the story. This also gives them the ability to tell you if there are certain things they wish to keep out of the story or they want to be included.

Ferkenhoff stated the importance of getting in touch with a victim to be a part of telling the story in situations that you are following the story through the court and it is an ongoing investigation. It is respectful to include victims in this process somehow whether that be through an interview or just by warning them of the release.

Bradbury also discussed the concept of following the story through the court system. She states that in bigger and more advanced stories, you will meet with victims leading up to the publishing of the story. Journalists will often meet up with victims to talk about the case and gather any additional information about the story. It is typically pretty difficult to find and contact the victim in shorter hit stories because their name and information is often redacted from court records. In this situation, journalists will reach out to the victim's attorney to warn them of the story and when it is being released.

Allen talked about how she will always warn a victim of the release of a story because she wants to avoid retraumatizing them at all costs. However, there are certain sexual violence stories that you don't need to contact victims for information or personal statements. These situations look like stories that specifically are highlighting numbers or data on sexual violence, not a specific incident. The goal of contacting a victim is to avoid shocking them with the publishing of the story.

What is typically the intended message of the story?

The goal of most publications when releasing a sexual violence story is to warn or alert the community of what happened. This is often the goal with serial attackers who have not been located or taken into custody by law enforcement yet. Journalists are looking to spread awareness of what has happened in hopes of preventing additional attacks. These stories often

include information like the type of people the attacker is targeting, a warning to not travel alone until further notice, or simply to be on high alert in that area. Another intended message would be to spread awareness of these kind of situations; to increase knowledge of sexual violence in the community. This is typically the intended message in stories of victims sharing their personal experience with the press and wanting to bring light to the situation.

According to Bradbury, in stories where the victim has chosen to come forward and speak out, the goal is generally prevention. But there are also other goals like accountability of law enforcement and perpetrator, policy reforms, or even fundraising.

Swoyer and Allen both discussed the goal of highlighting an institutional failures and changes of law. One example of an institutional failure from recently is that in multiple states, rapists can sue their victims for parental custody. Rape survivors are demanding stronger laws restricting rapists' parental rights in order to protect themselves and their children.

What information is included in these stories?

There were a variety of answers given to this question, but the one thing that all interviewees could agree on was that names of victims should never be shared in stories. The only exception is if the victim comes forward and gives permission to release their name. Putting names out of a victim who is a minor or who has not given their consent is a huge violation of their privacy. Some journalists said that they refuse to put names of victims even if their name has already been leaked simply to set an example for others and show their respect to the victim.

Another commonality amongst a few interviewees was asking themselves some questions to help determine if certain information should be included or not. What does the public need to know in order to understand the story? If this information wasn't included, would the audience

still be able to comprehend what was going on? Will this information put the victim or alleged attacker at risk? Does this information further the story or just take up space?

Allen talked about how in the past, publications have been known to release descriptions of attackers in news media when they have yet to be taken into custody or law enforcement is looking for them. “We are very hesitant about putting out a description,” (Allen, 2022). She explained that this isn’t practiced anymore because it has caused issues. Descriptions like this tend to be generic and unhelpful.

Bradbury said that she is always trying to answer the who, what, when, where, and most importantly, the why in these kinds of stories. However, the who and where portion of the list is left relatively anonymous. Names are almost always omitted from stories except in very specific situations, so age and gender are the go-to descriptors for the victim and attacker. Bradbury went on to explain that the relationship between attacker and victim may not be released to the public because it puts the identity of the victim at risk of being exposed. This can seem like a really important factor in understanding the full story. Bradbury argues that this keeping this information from the public something that can make stories less truthful. “I think sometimes the focus on anonymity can harm the public's ability to understand what's going on, because I think most people would kind of agree that like, so if we're anonymizing a child, right, and we don't want to say that it was their dad who assaulted them, the story does lose a little bit of truth, because we can only say, a man assaulted a child. And I think people consider that headline and they think that it's like stranger danger situation, where this child was, like, you know, snatched up at the park and assaulted,” (Bradbury, 2022). The location of attacks is typically a very generic description or is left at simply the street it happened on or even just the neighborhood. Journalists can’t be much more specific than that in order to keep identities protected.

Where does the information for the stories come from?

Information for sexual violence stories is coming from police reports, court reports, or directly from the victim. Swoyer talked about how the Washington Times gets most of their information on stories from the Associated Press since they aren't able to have journalists in every courtroom all the time.

What would you change about the way sexual violence is covered?

Swoyer said she hasn't noticed anything that she takes issue with in particular, but generally, editorializing should be kept at a minimum. "You know, I feel like nowadays... reporters editorialize things and... that's like across the board. It doesn't matter if you're at a conservative or a liberal publication. I think that's bad practice," (Swoyer, 2022). Editorializing refers to the commenting and expressing of opinions on stories rather than just reporting the news (Oxford Languages, 2022).

Bradbury felt that news organizations have gotten better over time. There are certainly still issues that need to be addressed and resolved, but overall, there has been some progress made. She would like to see journalists questioning the police narrative when writing these stories. Since the majority of information comes from police reports, journalists are putting a lot of faith in law enforcement's ability to represent the victim and what happened to them. Instead of fully depending on police narrative, journalists should do a better job listening to victims and making better efforts to engage with victims when possible. "I think a lot of times victims of sexual violence, feel re-violated by news coverage, particularly if they're not able to participate

in those initial kind of breaking stories. So, I think that there can be better efforts made at that early stage to engage victims,” (Bradbury, 2022).

Allen brought up earlier in her interview the idea of covering all your bases when writing sexual violence stories, or any sensitive story. She would like to see more journalists making an effort to write stories that are bulletproof. Journalists should consider all possible angles and counter arguments that they can to protect the victim and the publication. “You know, if somebody says they were sexually assaulted, it's not that I don't believe them, but to write a story that is bullet proof, which protects them, I need to be able to prove it. And so, I understand that those can be hard conversations. That's why I have them before the interview. And I just say like, it's not because I don't believe you. It's because I want to protect you because, you know, there's going to be a faction of people that come at the story and try to say that you're a liar. So, we need to get ahead of that,” (Allen, 2022). This ties back to Bradbury’s idea of questioning police narratives, going the extra mile to get multiple sources. She also talked about how journalists should be more careful about the ways stories are being investigated and reported. This means being more sensitive when talking to victims and being respectful. “When I am interviewing a person who has experienced sexual assault, I always tell them at the beginning, that, you know, I'm going to ask them a lot of questions. And some of them may be uncomfortable, or painful, and they can stop when they want to, and they can ask me questions if they want to, I sort of try to explain the rules of the interview,” (Allen, 2022).

Ferkenhoff wants to see stories given more context. When journalists report on sexual violence, they tend to put a list of facts and call it a story when in reality that isn't a story at all. He didn't give much information on how journalists go about making these reports into actual stories, but I think that by, again, going the extra mile to get more than one source for the story,

having multiple angles, engaging with the victim and hearing what they have to say, they can take these stories to a higher level. This can make a story more understandable for readers, it becomes a story that could happen to anyone, and in the long run, makes these stories more memorable than they would be if it was a reiterated version of a police report. “Without context, it's just a bunch of words that string together. And they may be factual, but they don't tell. They don't tell the audience anything other than something terrible happened. If you can explain the what, when, and all the other questions. I mean, the biggest question that I always have with a story is why now. Why are we telling the story now? And so, why are we telling the story? And if you can answer those questions in your head, then you have a story,” (Ferkenhoff, 2022).

Sweeney talked about how journalism has evolved over the years to become a place that is safe for victims and advocates for them. The issue that needs to be addressed is what journalists often cover. “I hope when we're writing about sexual violence, there is a bigger, broader mission here that it is not just to expose somebody's painful story, but it is to say, you know, there is something larger happening in society, whether it's they're not testing DNA kits, or we don't have police trained in how to properly conduct them. That there's something bigger going on here that we need to address,” (Sweeney, 2022).

Is the current method of coverage harmful or helpful for victims and the public?

Swoyer said that she doesn't see much wrong with the current method of coverage. She couldn't give me an answer of if the coverage is harmful or helpful.

Bradbury believes that journalists are generally helpful when they cover sexual violence stories. She does, however, think that the focus of anonymity can actually be harmful to the public. This was something she also brought up when asked about the information that is

included in sexual violence stories. The loss of truth can be harmful to the public and their understanding of situations. Bradbury even went as far to say that exclusion of names in some situations can be harmful and a loss of truth. This makes sense, but I don't believe most journalists would agree because of journalists' commitment to protecting victim anonymity.

Allen says that conversation on how to report on sexual violence are continually evolving. There isn't a set way that has been deemed the best way to cover sexual violence. She believes that journalists are generally helpful and when journalists write about sexual violence it is typically a good thing. Increasing visibility of sexual violence stories in news media would be helpful to the public in understanding the severity of sexual violence.

Eric Ferkenhoff expressed that unless journalists are careful when covering a sexual violence story, they are doing more harm than good. These stories need to be done well and correctly to make them worthwhile. When sexual violence stories are covered carelessly, they can cause victims to relive trauma and end up being harmful to both victims and the public. Ferkenhoff also brought up that sexual violence is not reported on enough and needs to be covered more proportionally to how often it happens.

Sweeney believes that this is the question journalists should be asking themselves before they publish or report on any sensitive topic. Journalists should be consistently evaluating if the information they are distributing is harmful or helpful. She also says that sexual violence needs to be covered in a more sensitive manner with more acknowledgements to research and fact.

Conclusion/Findings

It was truly a challenge to get any sort of response for this research. I had a difficult time

getting in touch with journalists from both conservative and liberal publications, however, it was more challenging to get a reply from journalists at conservative publications.

When I sent out my original email, I got one response saying they were willing to help me. The other responses I got consisted of questions about my research (specifically the determination of political affiliation of publications) or telling me they would ask their editor if they could participate. Every journalist from the first round of emails that asked their editor for permission to participate ended up never getting back to me or told me that they were not allowed to speak to me anymore. My thought was that this was because of the political portion of my research, so naturally I omitted it from my second round of emails. I got a significantly better response compared to the first round, but still was met with lots of radio silence. I was able to get an interview with five out of forty journalists I reached out to. This doesn't include the Facebook communities that I reached out to.

I think that the political portion of my research made the majority of journalists uncomfortable and skeptical of participating in the research. This was understandable since publications want to believe and be perceived as free of bias and politically neutral. I also think that there is a chance that the topic of sexual violence was challenging for people to be willing to talk about. I believe this is because it is a sensitive topic it's easy to say something wrong about it.

RQ1:

I was disappointed to only get interviews from five journalists, three of them from what my research would define as a liberal publication, one from a moderate publication, and one from a conservative publication. Because of the lack of participation from publications, RQ1, the

similarities and differences between conservative and liberal news media coverage of sexual violence, cannot be answered. My research cannot confidently conclude any similarities or difference between the way the two types of publications report on sexual violence. Since I was unable to get enough representation from the conservative side to answer RQ1, the questions and conclusions drawn are based only on RQ2 and RQ3.

RQ2:

The harm of the current coverage methods is that the qualifications for newsworthiness amongst all publications interviewed are too similar and too narrow. With these qualifications we can't expect to see any diverse coverage that represents sexual violence as a whole. Another issue with the current method of coverage is there is no consistent language used in these stories. Because of this, the public doesn't have a sound understanding of many terms commonly used in sexual violence cases and the different charges that could be presented to attackers. Journalists also aren't given specific editor guidelines for how to report on these stories. Guidelines could be what information should be included in stories, how to go about contacting victims, how to talk to victims and prepare them for interviews, and things like not being too graphic but not being too vague.

Journalists are doing well when it comes to reaching out to victims and involving them in the release of the story. Journalists should continue reaching out and informing victims of their story being released and utilizing victims as an additional source for the story. They also are publishing these stories with good intentions and positive goals to come from its release. Journalists' dedication to anonymity and the protection of victims is strong. This is so important when writing a story about sexual violence, and it seems like journalists have this at the front of

their mind when they are writing a story.

RQ3:

My suggestion would first be to scrap the idea of what makes sexual violence cases newsworthy. This needs to be reevaluated and consider if the current framework for newsworthiness is beneficial to the public's understanding of sexual violence. The goal of reevaluating what makes stories newsworthy would be to increase the coverage of sexual violence and depict a more accurate image of how frequently sexual violence occurs. Newsworthiness should not be determined by the unusuality of cases because that portrays an inaccurate image of what sexual violence truly looks like. It should also not be determined by the popularity of the people involved (Ferkenhoff, 2022). This also can portray an inaccurate image of what a victim looks like.

The second thing I would suggest is more strict and memorable editor guidelines. If they can't be memorable, then they should be easily accessible to journalists of your publication at all times. Definite things to include in these guidelines are how to get in contact with victims, how to approach and talk to victims who have recently experienced trauma (Allen, 2022), what to include from the police report, what information to get from victims, how to go about reporting a sexual violence story involving a minor (Bradbury, 2022), and how to avoid sensationalizing and editorializing sexual violence stories (Swoyer, 2022).

Language needs to be as consistent as possible in these stories. Find out what the victim would like to be called, a victim, a survivor, or something else, and stick with that (Bradbury, 2022). Charges need to be specific and accurate (Allen, 2022). Language that paints a strong

image of what happened to a victim should be avoided for the sake of their privacy (Ferkenhoff, 2022).

Every effort needs to be made to contact the victim somehow (Sweeney, 2022). Victims should always be warned of when their story is going to be released and where it will be published for their own safety (Allen, 2022). Victims can be contacted directly, through family, through a close friend, or through their attorney (Bradbury, 2022). They don't get a say in if stories are published (Ferkenhoff, 2022), but they do get a say in things like how they will be referred to in the story, if they wish to remain anonymous, and if they have any additional information they want to share.

There should also be an intended message for the story. A story cannot simply be shared just to share it. There are a number of messages that journalists should strive for when reporting on sexual violence that are helpful and beneficial. Some of these messages include public awareness and safety (Bradbury et al, 2022), increasing public education and understanding of sexual violence (what it is, what it looks like, where it can happen, who it can happen to), and spreading awareness (Allen et al, 2022).

When determining what information should be included in a sexual violence story there are a few questions journalists should ask themselves. Does the story need this information in order to make sense? Does the information support the story/is it relevant? Will this information clutter or take away from what is most important in the story? If I don't include this information, does the story remain truthful? Generally, stories should never include names (Swoyer et al, 2022) and specific locations of the attack in order to protect the identity of the victim. Some information that can be included are things like age and gender to describe a victim (Allen et al, 2022). Race can be helpful in situations where the sexual violence was racially motivated, and the same goes

with sexual orientation (Ferkenhoff, 2022). Relationship of the victim and attacker should not be disclosed unless journalists are given consent by the victim (Bradbury, 2022). When determining what information should be included, the priority should always be protecting the identity of the victim and respecting their wishes.

It would be unreasonable to ask journalists to publish every sexual violence story they come across. At that point it becomes ineffective, almost like wallpaper, and the public will pass right over it. Esther Thorson, a Professor of Journalism and Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences at Michigan State, wrote an article on the effects of news stories that put crime into context. Her research suggested that journalists include the public health information within every crime and violence story that is published. This included risk factors, prevention strategies, context of when crime and violence occur, and punishment. This would be a potential solution for helping the public understand frequency of sexual violence without having to entirely change what is already being published.

There is more that can be included to improve the way that sexual violence is covered by journalists. Until more research can be conducted, this is a solid starting point for journalists to cover sexual violence in a more respectful and accurate way that is beneficial to victims and the public.

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/EMAIL TEMPLATES

Interview Questions

1. What is your name with spelling, age, and level of education?
2. What news organization do you work for?
3. How often would you say sexual violence is covered by your publication?
4. What factors determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?
5. Do you have any editor guidelines for a sexual violence story?
6. What language is typically used in these stories?
 - a. Is there specific language you avoid?
 - b. Is there specific language you always use?
7. How involved is the victim in the release of the story?
 - a. Are you ever in contact with them?
 - b. Are they informed of the release?
8. What is typically the intended message of the story?
9. What information is typically included in these stories?
 - a. Name of victim/offender?
 - b. Age of victim/offender?
 - c. Sexual orientation of victim/offender?
 - d. Race of victim/offender?
 - e. Situation?
 - f. Location?
 - g. Date/time?

10. Where does the information for the story come from?
11. What would you change about the way these stories are covered?
12. Do you feel the current method of coverage is hurtful or helpful for victims and the public?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Round 1 Email:

Name,

My name is Katelyn Meyerpeter, I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. I am working on my thesis during the summer semester and was looking to set up a time to chat over Zoom with you in the next few weeks.

I am researching Conservative media coverage vs. Liberal media coverage of sexual violence. I am picking 14 journalists (7 from a seemingly Conservative publication and 7 from a seemingly Liberal publication) to conduct semi-structured interviews with about the process of covering sexual violence, the routines put in place for it, and if you think this method is harmful or helpful to victims of sexual violence. I hope to use this information to determine a method for covering sexual violence in the news that is both effective and respectful to victims.

If this is something you are able to participate in, please let me know and we can get a time set up for a Zoom meeting. If you feel that someone else at [Publication] would be a better fit for this opportunity, I would appreciate you sending me their contact information.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Thank you,
Katelyn Meyerpeter
University of Missouri
Graduate Studies
She/Her

Round II Email:

Name,

My name is Katelyn Meyerpeter, I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. I am working on my thesis during the summer semester and was looking to set up a time to chat over Zoom with you in the next few weeks.

I am researching how different publications report on sexual violence. I am picking 14 journalists to conduct semi-structured interviews with about the process of covering sexual violence, the routines put in place for it, and if you think this method is harmful or helpful to victims of sexual violence. I hope to use this information to determine a method for covering sexual violence in the news that is both effective and respectful to victims.

If this is something you are able to participate in, please let me know and we can get a time set up for a Zoom meeting. If you feel that someone else at [Publication] would be a better fit for this opportunity, I would appreciate you sending me their contact information. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Thank you,
Katelyn Meyerpeter

University of Missouri

Graduate Studies

She/Her

Follow Up Email:

Hi Name,

This is Katelyn Meyerpeter. I am just following up to make sure you received my last email from Date. If there are any questions I can answer about the research, please don't hesitate to let me know. Once again, if you feel that someone else at PUBLICATION would be a better fit for this opportunity, I would appreciate you sending me their contact information. I would like to get an interview scheduled within the next 2-3 weeks if possible.

Thank you,

Katelyn Meyerpeter

University of Missouri

Graduate Studies

She/Her

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEWS

Alex Swoyer—The Washington Times

MEYERPETER: Okay, so we'll just start with can you go ahead and just spell your name for me?

SWOYER: So it's Alex. A L E X. Last name Swoyer, S as in Sam W O Y E R.

MEYERPETER: Awesome. And what level of education do you have?

SWOYER: I'm a licensed attorney. So I have a JD.

MEYERPETER: And which publication do you work for?

SWOYER: I work for the Washington Times.

MEYERPETER: So how often would you say the Washington Times covers sexual violence?

SWOYER: See, that's the thing. Like we don't have somebody that specifically does that type of beat, right? So, like, it would only be, like, case by case if that folded into another beat. So, like, for me, you know, like I mentioned, like, sexual assault allegations I covered like the Cavanaugh hearing and Christine Blasi Ford. And then like, I think when there was- Capitol Hill was processing the updated like, employment- employee guidelines for the hill like laws, they, they- I covered that right during the "Me Too" movement. Like I don't- we don't have like a specific reporter that covers sexual violence. We are a pretty small publication.

MEYERPETER: What kind of, like, factors would determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?

SWOYER: I think like, again, this will probably depend on the beat, right? So like, for me, it was obviously newsworthy, like, I cover the Supreme Court so if one of the Supreme Court justices was accused or accused somebody of, you know, a sexual assault or harassment, some

type of claim, then that would obviously be newsworthy. Cases that concern changes of law or, in my opinion, like have an interesting fact pattern that I think a wide audience would be interested in or that could impact a wider audience, then I would highlight one of those cases, if that makes sense.

MEYERPETER: Yeah, that does make sense. Thank you. Um, so when you did cover the “Me Too” movement, did your- did you have like any guidelines from your editor for like, what they were looking for? Or anything like that?

SWOYER: No. So for my aspects, I was on the Hill on Capitol Hill. And I believe when, you know, there was all these allegations that were coming down. Now, you know, this has been a few years and I, I feel like my brain is like, foggy because I had a baby. And I've just been all over the place. But I if I remember, right, there's like, you know, there was a Senator Al Franken, there was just a bunch of series of different allegations, you know, across the nation, but also on the Hill about, like, supervisors being inappropriate with their employees. And so they updated legislation on the Hill about like, employee training, right. I've covered that, because obviously, it was newsworthy for Washington and I worked on the Hill. So it also had the national implication that the Capitol was trying to fall in line and update their laws and procedures and as a workplace like others were doing across the nation at the time. So that was news. I don't, I guess that that would just be for me. Now, when like, you might think of like, Bill Cosby, and like cases like that, that got a lot of attention. I didn't cover those specifically because since I mentioned, we're a small publication, we take wires from the Associated Press. So like if there's an AP reporter at the trial, which obviously like a trial like that our big story like that would be covered by the AP. We just take wires if that makes sense. Better to have some reporter that's in the courtroom than me trying to cover it from afar.

MEYERPETER: Okay, that makes sense. Um, I guess, do you think that you would be able to send me that story that you wrote?

SWOYER: I could try to locate it was from years ago.

MEYERPETER: Okay. Okay, that would be helpful for looking at like language used and things like that within the story.

SWOYER: If you're asking if there is any sort of narrative that editors want, that does not exist where I work.

MEYERPETER: Okay, cool. Um, I did want to ask, which you may not be able to answer, but like, how involved typically is like the victim or the person who makes the allegations in the release of these kinds of stories if you know?

SWOYER: So I guess that's kind of hard for me to say, right? Because I, I'm trying, I hope I'm not *not* helpful. But I'm trying to be helpful, but I don't really cover this. Like, I guess, with Christine Blasi Ford. I remember feeling really sorry for her because she didn't really want her name out there. And if we, so like, I'm someone who goes above and beyond to try to like not include names. For example, this isn't really a sexual violence case. But what I see a lot in court cases are like when minors are involved. They go by their initials, okay. Yeah. Even just recently, I covered like, I don't know, if you saw there's like this case involving Geico, where this woman got HPV from a guy after having sex in a car, and she's like, trying to get money. And anyways, so I covered that because it's an interesting fact pattern. But like, She obviously was, and the guy were identified by their initials, but like, in the docket, I can see names, but I don't release names, right? Because if they're in court papers as anonymous or just on their initials, I'm not gonna, I don't like believe and, and don't, you know, like, that's journalistic malpractice, in my mind. And so like, there was a Supreme Court case involving a young girl, she was like,

kicked off the cheer squad because she, like, posted something about like, F cheer on her Snapchat, and that became like, a First Amendment big case about like, school speech. And she since she was young, she was, you know, like, I guess was the right she, she was only identified by her initials, because she's a below age. She was a minor. And so like, I figured, I mean, it was like, everywhere who she was, because by the time the Supreme Court case came up, you know, there had been two years litigation, and she was 18. So like, her name and stuff was out there, it was easy to find her on Facebook, but like, I went ahead and didn't put her name out there until her attorneys were ready to do that, if that makes sense. So I know, that's not exactly like a sexual assault or sexual violence, but I still believe like, you know, in respecting people's wishes to stay anonymous.

MEYERPETER: Yeah. So you said you typically will refrain from using names? Is there any other information that you typically like, exclude or are sure to include like age or sexual orientation? Anything like that?

SWOYER: I think it's if it's relevant to the story then yeah. Right. Like if it's relevant, if like the context of the assault would be like, their sexual orientation would be relevant then sure. I don't really know if it like you know, I don't really can't think of an example or like age like if being a minor is relevant, then yeah, like you know what I'm saying. Something like I would say that's like another answer where it would be like case-by-case basis.

MEYERPETER: Yeah, for sure. You talked about how, I believe you said that, you would use the Associated Press because they had somebody in the courtroom like through the wire, I believe is what you said?

SWOYER: Yeah. So like, I don't know Are you familiar with wire service?

MEYERPETER: I am not.

SWOYER: Like a lot of times outlets have like, they take wire service from like Reuters or AP. So like, you can't get everywhere as a national you know, publication. So like with Breaking News. because sometimes we'll take like the AP story for the time being until we can like put get, you know, get to wherever we like send the reporter where we need them to be to cover it. Like something like a trial that goes on for a while, like they're gonna have, the AP will have like a reporter there. So we'll leave it to that reporter to cover. Does that make sense? And so like it's basically like a partnership?

MEYERPETER: Okay, yes. Got it. Got it. That makes sense. So that's typically like, in those kinds of cases, that's where you get your information from is through the Associated Press?

SWOYER: Yeah, I don't really like. Like I said, like, I would not spend time rewriting like a AP story like on Bill Cosby, for example, I would probably focus my time trying to cover something like the AP might not be focusing on like an interesting Supreme Court case, while they probably cover like the big news, right? Like, does that make sense? We try to divide our time.

MEYERPETER: Yes. Yes, that makes sense. Um just basing like, off of what you know about how sexual violence is covered in the media, not even just from your publication—Because I know you they don't do a lot of coverage of that it's a little smaller. But is there anything that you, like, would want to see change in the way that these stories are covered? Like, in, in whole, like, from all kinds of different publications?

SWOYER: I guess that's a good question. Because I haven't really, you know, with what I do, I haven't really paid attention to the coverage for these types of stories, right? Like, I mostly look at like court cases, which to me, it's pretty easy to cover a court case, because there's two parties, two sides. It's not like you can be really slanted one way or the other, necessarily, if you're, you know, doing it right. So I haven't really noticed anything like I've taken issue with, I can't really

think I mean, like if you gave me an example. But like off the top of my head, nothing comes to mind. I think the media as a whole could do a better example, or a better job of making sure, You know, I feel like nowadays, everything's you know, there's so much like, reporters editorialize things and I don't think that's, that's like across the board. It doesn't matter if you're at a conservative or a liberal publication. I think that's bad practice.

MEYERPETER: Yeah. Okay. For sure. Um, is there anything else that you would like to add before we wrap this up?

SWOYER: No, I'm sorry. I feel like I'm not helpful to what you're trying to do. But let me see real quick because I'm on my phone if I can find that story. Okay it looks like I covered a few things. Okay I'll send you a couple stories just about like the sexual harassment laws on Capitol Hill.

MEYERPETER: That sounds great.

SWOYER: If you have any follow ups, let me know. I'm sorry again about this morning.

MEYERPETER: No, that's totally fine. All good. And thank you so much for for being willing to talk with me. I really appreciate it.

SWOYER: Of course. Have a good one.

MEYERPETER: You too.

Shelly Bradbury—The Denver Post-Dispatch

MEYERPETER: Okay, I don't want to take up too much of your time. So we can just get started right off the bat. Just a little rundown. My project is over coverage methods of sexual violence in the media. So I'm asking a bunch of different publications and journalists like, what they do in that situation and trying to get a feel for any routines, or methods that they go about. And my

goal is to find altogether a better way that's more respectful, and just more accurate to cover that in the media. Okay, so I just need your name and spelling and your level of education.

BRADBURY: So my name is Shelley Bradbury. It's S H E L L Y. My last name is B R A D B U R Y. What was the second thing that you needed?

MEYERPETER: Your level of education?

BRADBURY: Oh, yeah, I have a bachelor's degree in journalism. And then are you, for this research, are you, are we anonymized? Are you using our names?

MEYERPETER: If you would prefer to be anonymous, I can do that.

BRADBURY: Okay, I don't care. I don't think I was just kind of curious.

MEYERPETER: Yeah, if you change your mind, just email me. And I'm happy to give you a different name, or just keep you anonymous. And then the, if you could just state the news organization that you work for, that would be great.

BRADBURY: I work for the Denver Post.

MEYERPETER: Okay, now we can get to the more interesting questions. How often would you say sexual violence is covered by your publication?

BRADBURY: Um, I would say we cover it frequently, probably at least once a week.

MEYERPETER: Okay. So what factors kind of determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?

BRADBURY: At the Denver Post, so we don't cover most sexual violence. It sort of rises to our level if somebody dies, or if it is a very public attack, or if there is a perpetrator who's on the loose and police, they're like warning people to be on the lookout or somebody who's making serial attacks. We also will cover if there's something like a particularly egregious case, maybe somebody who has multiple victims or multiple child victims. Usually, we'll come into those

cases of the arrest phase when the suspect is arrested, particularly if police put out some sort of release about basically flagging the case as being particularly egregious. I guess the other avenue that things come to us is through like lawsuits, or court filings that way?

MEYERPETER: Okay. Um, so when covering a sexual violence story, do you have, are you guys given any, like editor guidelines, routines type of thing? What they're looking for in that? Or is it, you guys kind of go out and it's your judgment of what should be included?

BRADBURY: It's kind of a mix. We definitely do have established policies for covering sexual assault. I had had a busy morning, I would have looked them up. Let me see if I could find them real quick. But, um, generally, I can tell you like the general overview is that we don't ever name victims of sexual violence unless they want to be named. Or that's pretty much the only reason like even if they testified in open court and their name was read out, probably would not still use their name. Unless they give us personal, direct permission to do so or like their attorney is has given that permission on their behalf.

MEYERPETER: Yeah. Is there any other guidelines kind of given or is the name the big one?

BRADBURY: I think the name is a big one. What other sorts of guidelines have you run into maybe?

MEYERPETER: I've run into things like should we include, like the age of the victim, or the sexual orientation, race, those kinds of things.

BRADBURY: So generally, with stuff like that, it's just whether or not it's relevant to the story. So if a person was attacked and suffered sexual violence because of their race, then we would mention their race. If it was not a race-based attack, then we would not mention their race. Age, we generally will mention, particularly if it's a child, or the age is, otherwise, somehow interesting or noteworthy. And then sexual orientation, I don't think is a thing we usually include.

The exception to that would be like we've we recently had a case where an attorney was accused of sexually assaulting his client, and the client was male, like in that case, in that story, it would say that this assault was male on male, but I don't think we would explicitly say like, this person is gay, or this person is bi or, this person is straight. So it's kind of implied.

MEYERPETER: And then like any, like, general information, like, say, location, what the situation was, if you have that information, or like, if this is a case, that's from forever ago, would you say like this happened this many years ago? Or like, you know?

BRADBURY: Yeah, definitely. I think the basics like who, what, when, where, why if you know why are always in any news story. So we're not just like, we would not exclude that just because it was about sexual assault, we might make some effort to, because we want to keep the victims anonymous. So we might make some effort to if they say, like, this shoot, this sexual assault happened at this address, and they give the exact address of the house, we would probably say it happened on that block or on that street or in that neighborhood, to prevent somebody figuring out like a neighbor reading it and being like, oh, that's Jane's house. So Jane must have been the victim here. And we'd also do the same thing for child victims. So if, if a father assaults his daughter, we would not disclose the relationship between the child victim and the adult, in order to serve again, protect the identity of the victim. So we would not say like, Dad accused of raping his three year old daughter, we would just say that excuse for a man accused of raping a three year old girl, if that makes sense.

MEYERPETER: That does make sense. Thank you. So what kind of language is typically used in these stories? Just kind of a background on that question, I did a lot of prior research on coverage, and there was a lot of information on identifying like them as a victim or a survivor or

using alleged or accused or, you know, things like that. Is there any language that you specifically use or avoid in those situations?

BRADBURY: It's kind of mostly like I don't have, I don't think we have like a set policy that says you have to use these particular words. But generally, we will like depending on what we're writing about it. So like in the for our conviction in court, we do always need to make sure that we emphasize that this is the suspect who is accused, not like a man who perpetrated an assault. So there's always that sort of level of alleged-ness. I personally do not like the word alleged. But we don't have like a policy against using it at the post. Yeah, as far as like victim versus survivor, I tend to base that, that also tends to change depending on the type of coverage that we're doing. So a lot of this is very dependent on the type of coverage we're doing. Like if it's just a, we're writing a like quick hit, like one day news crime story on an assault that happened or an arrest that was made. That's, generally we'll use like terms such as victim, because they're the terms that are most clear about the roles of the various people. If we're doing something more in depth, like we're talking to a sexual assault survivor, and they're telling us like, I really hate the word victim, like I want to be called a survivor, like victim is, I've heard often people say, you know, like, victim is kind of a label that I reject, even though this thing happened to me, I'm not a quote unquote, victim, then obviously, we're gonna do what the source wants, we're not going to use a label that they don't want to be labeled. So yeah, so I'm not sure like, I feel like there's a very wide range of sexual assault and sexual violence coverage. And so it kind of depends on the type of coverage is happening. Sort of similarly, like, if we're writing about a study that says, like, you know, we looked at whatever the study might look at, like the rate of sexual violence in Denver or whatnot, then we're probably likely to, to sort of use the language that's used in the

study. So if the study says there were 80 victims of sexual assault, we probably would say victims, and if they said we reduce 80 survivors, then we would probably say survivors.

MEYERPETER: Part of your answer kind of leads into the next question, How involved is the victim in the release of the story typically?

BRADBURY: Yeah, this is kind of connected. So again, it's like, it's very different. Depending on the type of study that's being done, I think we do always try to make an attempt to find the victim, before publishing, even on the kind of quicker hits or reaching out to an attorney, it's often pretty difficult because they're often redacted. Their names are often redacted from the records that we get. So it's makes it kind of problematic on the front end to find them. It's much easier actually to find the suspects name and information. So side note there. But yeah, there's generally an effort to reach out, it's usually unsuccessful. And then. Yeah. And then if it's like a more advanced story, that usually will involve meeting with, with the victim and sitting down and talking, and whatnot, but just kind of depends on what type of story is happening.

MEYERPETER: What is typically the intended, like, message of the stories released? Like, what's the goal or like the hope from releasing those stories?

BRADBURY: I hate to keep saying this. But again, it sort of like differs depending on the type of story that's being done. So like, if there is a story about a rapist who's on the loose, and, you know, attacking joggers on the running trail, then obviously, like the point of that story is to warn people about the potential for violence and hopefully prevent additional assaults. I think if it's a story about an arrest of a perpetrator in some sort of case, sometimes those are just to let people know that this has happened. Kind of like the Street News. This is what's going on in your community type of a situation. And then if it's like one of the more like, in depth stories, those can have, just like dozens of purposes. I spoke to a survivor of sexual assault. It was either last

year two years ago for a story in which she just wanted to talk about how she'd reported her assault to police, and they investigated and they recommended that charges be filed, but then prosecutors declined to charge the person who assaulted her. And then that story allowed us to look at the rates of prosecution for sexual assaults in Denver and found that it was pretty low. And then that allowed us to kind of ask the district attorney like Why aren't you charging these cases? And what does it take to build up an actual sexual assault case. And that kind of opened the door to while going through the court system as a sex assault survivors, really trauma, re-traumatizing in a lot of ways. So like that story, kind of had all those purposes, built into it. Yeah. And I know, like other survivors of sexual violence might come forward to talk about prevention, or accountability or policy reforms, or maybe their fundraising for some sort of, you know, event. So I think like the, the purposes can be really wide. Just sort of depending on exactly what kind of coverage is happening.

MEYERPETER: Yeah, that's good. That's a good answer. Where does the information for the story typically come from?

BRADBURY: I think at the beginning, we usually get a lot of information from police reports and arrest reports. Again, though, that's kind of depending on where the story is coming from. So like, in the story, I was just telling you about the woman who was assaulted, and there were no charges filed. That information initially came from her, and from interviews with her, and then we corroborated it through police reports. So that was kind of vice versa. It's kind of backwards. But I think generally, the initial information does usually come from the police side of things, or sometimes prosecutors. And court records. But yeah.

MEYERPETER: Um, what would you want to see change about the way these stories are covered? If any?

BRADBURY: Good question. Yeah, I don't know. It's like there's such a wide range of the way these stories can be handled. I think that news organizations have gotten better over time at questioning, perhaps police narratives. And maybe attempting to do a better job of listening to victims, and they're, like, not rejecting their framing just because they're a victim. So I think that progress has been made, there probably there's more progress that can be made. I think a lot of times victims of sexual violence, feel re violated by news coverage, particularly if they're not able to participate in the especially those initial kind of breaking stories. So I think that there can be better efforts made at that early stage to engage victims, although also, on the other hand, they usually don't want to be engaged at that point, like they just come out of a big trauma. So there's a lot of fear and hesitancy. So it's kind of a balancing act between journalists to try to both reach out but also not be disrespectful, or make things worse by reaching out. I think we've done a little bit of a better job of rejecting the narrative of a victim who deserved what happened to them, which I think was pretty common previously, still is very common in court. So yeah, I feel like there has been some progress made but still significant problems.

MEYERPETER: Do you I feel that the current, like method of coverage is more harmful or more helpful for victims and the public?

BRADBURY: Yeah, I think that we are generally helpful. With I would like to say that with an Asterix, because I know that there are some times when it's not helpful. But I think that we are getting better at covering sexual violence. And there's more awareness now than there has been in the past to some of the nuances of cases. I think sometimes the focus on anonymity can harm the public's ability to understand what's going on, because I think most people would kind of agree that like, so if we're anonymizing a child, right, and we don't want to say that it was their dad who assaulted them, the story does lose a little bit of truth, because we can only say, a man

assaulted a child. And I think people consider that headline and they think that it's like stranger danger situation, where this child was, like, you know, snatched up at the park and assaulted. But the reality is that doing the assaulting. So I think sometimes the sort of very ingrained, I think that's like, the most ingrained rule about reporting on sexual violence in newsrooms is like don't name the victim. But it can sometimes cause problems as far as conveying the reality of what happened. And I think that can sometimes harm the public's perception and understanding of events. And I don't know how exactly we get around that without, but it really is like the golden rule like don't name victims. So yeah, and I think it's in place for a very good reason. But it does cause some hiccups at times.

MEYERPETER: Yeah, that was the same patterns that I found in the research readings that I've done. Like, it is important to remain like to keep victims anonymous, but it's also like, there is that gap of truth or like, it is part of the story, the relationship or who, who they are and it can't be shared. So yeah. And then, just one last thing, is there anything that you would like to add to this or any information that you feel is important that I haven't touched on anything at all?

BRADBURY: I think maybe draw a parallel between the approach to reporting on sexual violence and the approach to reporting on mass shootings, if there's a lot of the same conversations going on in those two topics. There was a time when newspapers would name every victim of sexual assault until there was this pushback of let's not do that. And I think there's a similar pushback right now happening around naming the mass shooting suspects, where it's something that the news business has always done. And now we've got kind of a growing body of research saying that it's harmful to do that, and creates more copycats. So I guess when I think about this conversation, I kind of think about it in the same light as coverage

of mass shootings, because it's the same sort of dilemma around how do we cover this ethically while honoring the Do No Harm part of journalism.

MEYERPETER: Awesome. Well, thank you so much. That's all I have. If you think of anything else, or if like I said, if you change your mind about wanting to remain anonymous, please don't hesitate to reach out. And, yeah, thank you so much for participating in this. I really appreciate it.

BRADBURY: Yeah, no problem. Thanks for keeping it quick.

MEYERPETER: Yeah, of course. Great to meet you.

Evan Allen—The Boston Globe

MEYERPETER: Okay, so your name was spelling and level of education.

ALLEN: My name spelling and love. So it's E. V. A. N. A. L. L. E. N., and I have a bachelor's degree.

MEYERPETER: And the news organization that you work for

ALLEN: the Boston Globe.

MEYERPETER: Okay, so how often would you say sexual violence is covered by the Boston Globe?

ALLEN: I mean, fairly often, I guess.

MEYERPETER: And what factors determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?

ALLEN: Um, the well, the identity of the perpetrator whether or not the victim was murdered, you know, because of privacy issues, we often don't write about sexual violence. If a victim is living just because I mean, it depends on a whole lot of different things. But we obviously don't identify survivors of sexual assault without their permission. And that often means that we don't write about sexual violence, often the victim and perpetrator are known to each other. But so

yeah, so the, it becomes newsworthy if the perpetrator is a person with power. Or, you know, a person who I mean has, you know, with a sort of a public platform, if there are public person, the same often saw, I mean, sometimes if the victim is an important or known person, and has decided to speak out, sometimes we'll write about it just if the, if the victim has decided to speak out, and they want to tell their story for some reason. We'll also write about it, if there's an institutional failure, that has put people at risk, I would say, for me, that tends to be a lot of where, when I write about sexual violence, it's through the lens of the failures of sort of social systems to keep people safe. And in those cases, we often are not naming the victims, because that's, it's not a personal story, per se, we're not trying to tell someone's individual story we're trying to tell about the failure of the institution. So and I guess, you know, another much less common category would be if the, if the act of sexual violence itself, happened in some kind of public location, if there's a public element to the violence. You know, you periodically hear about, like awful cases where someone will be assaulted in public. And then, you know, sometimes I'll write about it if like the, if there's, you know, I've written about trials, like, you know, I wrote about years and years ago, that trial of man who was accused of a series of pretty savage rapes, but he decided to represent himself in court. And so there was this very bizarre cross examination of his own victims. And we wrote about that, because that's sort of like, that's just a very unusual element and a trial as a public occurrence. And, you know, in that case, we didn't name the victim. So, I would say those are sort of the major categories. I'm sure there are others that I'm not thinking of, but those are sort of the broad strokes categories.

MEYERPETER: Are you guys given any, like editor guidelines for a sexual violence story? Kind of like, what should be included or not? And like, any sort of angle that is supposed to be taken for that?

ALLEN: Are you I mean, there's so many different kinds of sexual violence stories. Are you talking about investigative are you talking about like a daily breaking news story? Like what kind of story are you talking about?

MEYERPETER: Let's say a daily breaking news story

ALLEN: I mean, if it's just like, if, if it's something about a crime, I mean, I guess, obviously, you would not be identifying the victims unless they wanted that. You know, you try not to be too graphic with the descriptions of the sexual violence. I guess it was probably the big one. You don't want it You know, you don't want to sensationalize anything. So I guess that would be the big one. I mean, there are. There are other cases where you do need to be not graphic but specific about, about the types of sexual violence that someone perpetrates, that tends to fall in the more investigative category. I know that when they were doing the Catholic Church stuff, they were pretty specific with their victims talking about the specific acts of sexual violence that had occurred. And then they also without huge amounts of detail, but there were specific as to what acts of sexual violence occurred, because that was very important to the story. You know, I have done stories where, you know, you need to be a little bit you can't just say sexual assault, you need to be just, like, slightly more specific, without being graphic about the type of violence. But yeah, I mean, I guess just not being not being unnecessarily graphic is an important part.

MEYERPETER: Um, is there any specific language that you try to avoid when writing these stories? I know, other journalists have talked about the use of survivor or victim, or the use of alleges and things like that, is there anything that you guys try and like stay away from?

ALLEN: Um, I mean, we try when it's possible to use survivor language as opposed to victim language. You know, sometimes the victim is dead. So it's not, there are all sorts of different things that change it, and also depends on how the person identifies as well. So we would, you

know, if we're talking to the person, we would go with what they prefer, you know, the people have the word alleged is illegal. It is a term that is not, the public misunderstands the word alleged. And they take it to mean that the reporter doesn't believe the person they're discussing. But alleged is a very important word that protects us all from a libel suit. So the idea that we wouldn't use alleged because it hurts people's feelings is like, that's just not very savvy. Because that's not how it works. I mean, the same thing, people get all angry that, you know, there's a difference between the terms, murder, and homicide. Murder is a legal term. And it involves a certain, like, certain baselines to be met by the legal system, and it is decided by a jury or a judge. Whereas homicide just describes the act of killing another person. So, you know, I don't avoid the word alleged because it protects me and it protects the person who's speaking to me as well. You know, if we don't use alleged, and a person with a whole bunch of money decides to sue us, then discovery is going to harm the person who spoke to us who is either the, you know, the victim of the assault, but they could also just directly sue the person who is making the accusation. So I actually find it. The idea that we would avoid alleged is not correct I mean, we do avoid language, like she claimed, you know, that's a very claimed is very loaded. You know, you pretty much usually almost always want to go with said, we try not to use language like that we also try. We don't use you don't want to imply that the person who was assaulted in any way deserved it or was responsible for it. You know, that can be tricky when sorry. You know, there are some times where I, like, you know, in the past I've written about there was like a spate of sexual assaults in one particular neighborhood, and the police were putting out a warning for people because they hadn't caught the guy doing it. And so the police put out a warning and just said, like, you know, this is happening, and people need to be aware of it and don't walk alone at night. And as a woman, I very much bristle at the idea of being told don't walk alone at night.

And yet, if there is a rapist on the loose who the police cannot catch, then it's pretty smart not to walk alone at night for me, and like I would be in more danger than my husband would be in. So there's sort of like shades of grey and I have, I always take issue with people that make these like absolute sweeping statements. I think sexual violence is difficult to write about for a lot of reasons. And you need to be really careful and really thoughtful about how you do it. But I think like, I think being absolute about how you are allowed to talk about it is unhelpful as well. Because you need to be able to the world is a very complicated place, and you need to be able to describe it in all sorts of ways. So certainly, there are things that you avoid, as a general rule, or try to do as a general rule. But there are always going to be different kinds of exceptions to that. So I just always try to keep in mind, like, I tried to keep in mind the mistakes of the past, frankly, or the mistakes that I've seen other publications make. And try not to repeat them.

MEYERPETER: Um, how involved is the victim in the release of the story? Typically?

ALLEN: How involved? What do you mean?

MEYERPETER: So I have heard people say that they aren't able to reach the survivor, or, but they're still told to, like, make a release a story about it. But like, there's also people who have told me that they are able to get in touch with them, and they're like, how would you like to be referred? Do you want to remain anonymous? You know, things like that? Or, like, do you even want this released to the public type of thing?

ALLEN: Um, I mean, I guess it there are just I'm trying to think of, there are so many different types of stories you might be working on. I mean, if you've decided that there is a news element to releasing a story about a sexual assault, if, for example, you found out that the president of a college was guilty of sexual assault, and you decided this is like a newsworthy angle, and we need to release it, you wouldn't, you would certainly call the victim and I would do so I try to be

very mindful of not. I don't want to unnecessarily re traumatize the person. I mean, sometimes you have to talk about hard things. And sometimes that can be dramatic. So I think that in reporting on sexual assault, you have to be aware that sometimes your actions can cause pain to the person who was assaulted. And you have to sort of say to yourself, like this is for some greater good like this is this is a newsworthy thing this needs to be written about. And so but you're making an exchange, and so you do need to, like be mindful of the fact that, yeah, call it a reporter, calling a victim of sexual assault is probably upsetting, I mean, and you're just taking the risk there. So you like, it's something to be aware of, it should not stop you all the time, because there are certain things that, you know, are important for the public to know. But so, you know, if I was writing about this fictional college president that I've created, um, I would certainly try to get in touch with the victim, I might do that through an intermediary through someone they trust, so that I'm not going directly to them. Because that also can give them a little bit of space to feel whatever they need to feel, and without feeling like they're being sort of observed in their reaction. And it can also, I always make sure that like, you know, if it's possible, to sort of allowed, like, I'll tell people, you know, talk about this with your family, talk about it with your lawyer, like, whatever it is you want, you want to give them sort of some space to process it. I probably wouldn't. If I've decided that, like, this is 100% of story that is in the public interest to be published, I wouldn't be asking the victim if it is okay. But, you know, there are some stories where I would like I have certainly pursued, there was a legal case a few years back, where a rapist was trying to get custody of the child, he fathered with the victim. And so that felt like a failure of an institution, right, the idea that someone could use the state's laws in this really despicable way. But we felt like in order to do that story, we needed the participation and cooperation and buy in of the victim. And she didn't want to give it and so we didn't do the

story. So there are certain things that like, you can't do a story like that without the person who had happened to. So every time is sort of a calculation, but I mean, you know, I guess we try I guess we, when the victim would be an important part of the story as opposed to just like, you know, their stories did you do that? Or like, you know, MIT reported 17 rapes over the course of the last school year, then you're not calling victims because it doesn't matter the individual person you're reporting numbers, but if the person's story is any kind of important part of your story, you do need to try to get in touch with them, and you, at minimum need to let them know what's going to be published. And give them a chance to comment if they want to. And also, if there's anything that they want to, like, say. And, you know, I always try to be as clear as I can with people. So they know when it's going to run, they know where in the newspaper, it's going to run, like, will it be on the front page? Or will it be inside Metro. So just sort of, like, let people feel prepared for it. So they're not feeling blindsided. And I do that even when, you know, I had a story run. At the end of last year, there was actually about a man who was in prison for sex trafficking. And the story was about him and how he had sort of, I mean, it's much more complicated than this, but it was sort of about how he became a violent sexual predator. And, you know, the victims were not really, they were not identifiable. They were not the the details of their stories were not included in enormous detail at all, it was like very bare bones, because it wasn't really about the crime. Specifically, it was about all these failures that preceded the crime. So I didn't need to interview them. But we did need to let them know that it was happening. So I called, you know, like, a week before it ran, I called the US Attorney's Office, because they were the ones that prosecuted the case. And I spoke to someone over there and just said, like, you know, I don't need to talk to them. We're not naming them, like they're not identifiable in any way. But the victims of Anthony Pledger should know that there's a story coming out about him.

And that, you know, just it's gonna be on the front page. And it'll be on this date. And I just don't want them to feel blindsided. So they should feel free to call me if they want to. None of them did. And I'm happy to answer any questions they have. And I sort of explained the story a little bit. But so stuff like that. I mean, you know, you want to what you want to try to do is avoid shocking people. And so that is sort of the guiding principle.

MEYERPETER: For sure, yeah. Um, so, what would you say is typically the intended like, message or like the goal of releasing a story?

ALLEN: I mean, for me, it usually would be to highlight systemic failures, or corruption. That puts people in danger. Or, you know, I did some stories about the way that probate court fails victims of sexual violence, just by not believing them, and often putting them back with their abusers. You know, in a news story, it would be maybe a, you know, like, I talked about the rapes in that one neighborhood, just sort of like an advisory for people to be, you know, this is happening and take these extra precautions. You know, sometimes it's like, you know, this person with a lot of power is using it for evil. If it's a like, a me to type story. Or sometimes it's, you know, if it's a victim centered story, where they're sort of telling their story, it would be about, you know, shedding light on whatever element of their story that they're highlighting, whether it's like, their fight to be believed, or their fight to recover, or how common something is. You know, so it'll be highlighting some part of their story. So, yeah.

MEYERPETER: Okay. Um, this one's kinda like a. This was a weird question, I guess. But like, what information is typically included in these stories? So we discussed that you tend to keep survivors anonymous. But would you say that things like age, sexual orientation, race? Those kinds of things? Are they typically included in these stories are no.

ALLEN: Age maybe. I mean, I mean, probably age, I think that tends to be like a fairly. If you're going to have one descriptor of a person, in addition to gender, it's going to be age. I don't think sexual orientation typically has, at least for the person who was assaulted, it's sort of irrelevant. We wouldn't include that. Race tends also not to be relevant, unless there's some. You know, we I mean, we don't even now like often even so if there if the police were looking if there was some, like serial rapist on the run, and the police had their specific identity, I could see a scenario in which you'd say like, the police are looking for a six foot 10 Hispanic man or something. That almost never happens. And we have also grown. We are very hesitant about putting out a description of a generic, not generic, but if somebody says we're looking for a black man, like everyone should be a little suspicious. So I think we have moved away from that, like it used to be, we used to publish like, descriptions of suspects. You know, not just for sexual assaults. But for anything, we would publish like, a there's a goal description of suspects much more frequently than we do now. So yeah, I mean, I think in a story where we're not identifying a person, I assume you're talking about the person who was assaulted, we would probably include their gender and their age. And then, you know, there may be some other like, Yeah, I mean, that'd be the basics. And then the, I think the only reason we would include more as if there's some, like, extremely specific and very good reason, or because the person was coming forward to identify themselves.

MEYERPETER: Okay, yeah. Um, where does the information for these stories typically come from?

ALLEN: I mean, if it's like a daily news story, then it would be probably from like a DEA press release or a police report or something like that. If it's an investigative story, then it's much more from participants. I mean, and by that, I mean, like people who the person who was assaulted

their family members or friends, anybody that that sort of, would be involved in some way.

Some of that is from the perpetrator if the perpetrator is talking. Or their attorney, I mean, so basically, people involved in some way.

MEYERPETER: And what would you want to see changed about the way that these stories are covered?

ALLEN: I mean, I think there have been a lot of good changes. Just in terms of, you know, the me to movement obviously just changed the way that we talk about sexual assault and sexual harassment and the seriousness with which we treat that stuff. You know, I think, I guess one thing that I would like to see a little more of is a little more. And, you know, I think this is on the media, like a little more literacy, and in the part of the public, I'm like, how these stories get investigated and reported. You know, for example, when I am interviewing a person who has experienced sexual assault, I always tell them at the beginning, that, you know, I'm going to ask them a lot of questions. And some of them may be uncomfortable, or painful, and they can stop when they want to, and they can ask me questions if they want to, I sort of tried to explain the rules of the interview. But one of the things that I always let people know is that, you know, I'm going to ask for corroborating evidence. So that is paperwork, you know, court filings, or like contemporaneous text messages, or a diary entry is just to bolster. You know, if somebody says they were sexually assaulted, it's not that I don't believe them, but to write a story that is bullet proof, which protects them. I need to be able to prove it. And so I think, you know, people can and, you know, I understand that those can be hard conversations. That's why That's why I have them before the interview. And I just say like, it's not because I don't believe you. It's because I want to protect you because, you know, there's going to be a faction of people that come at the story and try to say that you're a liar. So we need to get ahead of that. So I think there can be a

squeamishness, sometimes with the idea of questioning a rape victim. And I think that's good. Like there didn't used to be any squeamishness with questioning a rape victim. And that was very bad. That led to things like how short was your skirt? And how drunk? Were you? And those are not, that's not reasonable. But I guess like it is, it is journalism, to ask for proof. And so we do that. And that protects us and it protects the person who was assaulted, who wants their story to stand up. So I think sometimes, you know, we may need to be it's just a it's a very fraught, it's a very fraught universe to report in. It's a hard thing to report on for a lot of reasons. And so I think there's been big improvements, like, much bigger than I ever thought would happen, frankly. And it's continuing to sort of be refined, I guess. I don't know if that's a very good answer, but it's my answer.

MEYERPETER: For sure. Um, and then, related to that question, do you feel that the current methods of coverage are more harmful or helpful for victims and the public?

ALLEN: The current methods of coverage are harmful? Um, I mean, I would say that the increased visibility, I suppose or I mean, I think that's overall. A good thing? You know, I think there are some places where our conversations about how to report on this stuff is still evolving, and I'm not sure people have the right answer. You know, I'll give you an example. There's a lot of there has been, you know, a lot of discussion of sexual assault on college campuses. And sort of Title Nine and like the rights of accusers, and the rights of people being accused. And, you know, there's sort of a debate about people who are accused, what kind of rights they have to respond or be represented or whatever. And, I mean, there have been people that have I mean, like, I don't know, I mean, like, it's just very difficult. I, I don't even I don't understand why colleges are trying to adjudicate sexual assault in the first place. But like, I don't know, it's just it's just such a it's such a broad. I forget your question. Sorry.

MEYERPETER: That's okay. I was just asking, how about harmful or how harmful or helpful?

ALLEN: I think, overall, the advanced, the increased visibility is helpful. I think, you know, you still see debates playing out in real time, about how to cover things. And I think it's just still I think it's still evolving. You know, I thought the stuff with Amber Heard and joined up was, like, fairly horrifying, the way that was covered that was covered like a circus. And you saw so many of the things that, you know, people have been trying to, I mean, I don't know, I didn't really follow it super closely, because I found it horrible. But just in the way that that was being discussed, you saw a lot of the same, it felt like going back in time, 30 years. So I think we still have some problems. Oops.

MEYERPETER: And then just if, is there anything else that you would like to add that I didn't ask?

ALLEN: Um, are you doing any? Like, do you? Is this all about how sexual assault is portrayed in the media? Or, like, are you asking people questions about how they actually report like, do the, like interviewing? I mean, like, I guess the reason I ask is like, interviewing somebody who was sexually assaulted, takes like an enormous amount of care and time to make sure that you're because you have to discuss things that are very painful, in a very clear way. And you can't use euphemism you can't like there are none of the sort of protections that protect us in regular conversation. But you also just need to make sure that you're not like, unnecessarily re traumatizing the person that you're talking to. And that can be a fine line to walk. And so I think, I guess the only other thing that I would say is that for anybody who's actually reporting on sexual assault or sexual abuse. It's really worth doing. I mean, I've read a ton about, like, trauma and, you know, all sorts of different things sort of just you need to be very well educated in terms of like how to talk to a person, so you're not making them more traumatized.

MEYERPETER: For sure. Yeah. I. So my goal for this project is to come up with a way that is, like, appropriate, accurate, and like, respectful for covering these stories, in hopes that would not re-traumatize the victim, just because I know how important that is. And I feel like in the past that hasn't been done. Well, I definitely think it's better recently, but there's always room for improvement. So yeah. But that's, that's all I have for you. So I hope that wasn't too difficult. So, but thank you so much for, for being willing to participate. I really appreciate it's really helpful. And if you have any questions or anything at all that you need for me, just email me anytime. I'll get back to you for sure. And yeah, that's all great. Thanks. All right. Thank you so much. It's good to meet you.

ALLEN: Bye.

Eric Ferkenhoff—USA Today

FERKENHOFF: Hey.

MEYERPETER: Good morning.

FERKENHOFF: Good morning, can you hear me?

MEYERPETER: I can.

FERKENHOFF: Can you see me?

MEYERPETER: I can.

FERKENHOFF: Good.

MEYERPETER: Perfect. Well it is good to meet you.

FERKENHOFF: Good to meet you. It's a cool project. And you're at a very good school.

MEYERPETER: Thank you so much. I really appreciate that. It's a tough school for journalism, that is for sure.

FERKENHOFF: Yeah. Although, I went to KU. So I'm doing this against my, my editors. My editor is a KU grad also.

MEYERPETER: Well, I appreciate the sacrifice.

FERKENHOFF: Yes, it is. But I'm kidding. So ask away.

MEYERPETER: Awesome. So we'll just, I have my list pulled up. So we'll just start with the basics. Can you just give me your name with spelling and your level of education?

FERKENHOFF: Eric E, R, I, C, Ferkenhoff F, like Frank, E, R, K, E, N, like Nancy, H, O, F, F. And level of education. I graduated from KU in History, English, and Poli Sci.

MEYERPETER: Awesome. And the news organization you work for?

FERKENHOFF: I work for the USA Today Network.

MEYERPETER: Alright. How often would you say sexual violence is covered by your publication?

FERKENHOFF: We're very careful in how we handle sexual violence, we will use it anecdotally, for example, and like investigative stories and so forth. But it's a it's an issue that needs to be covered more, I would say. Because it's so rampant, and a lot of victims don't come forward. Sexual violence against men, women, boys, girls, what have you, especially transgender, and so forth. So it needs to be covered more often. But the statistics are really terrible. And so sometimes some reporters will shy away, just based on the data. But anecdotally, I did a story, for example, about how qualified immunity, and another law prevented lawsuits against a police officer and a police department. In cases where an officer had been found guilty of sexually assaulting a woman. Lawsuits couldn't go forward. And she had the guts to come forward and talk about her story. So how often is it covered? I probably can't say, because we

have hundreds of newspapers across the country. But I know that, for me personally, I think it's an undercovered topic, and one that I like to cover as much as possible to spread awareness.

MEYERPETER: And what factors typically determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?

FERKENHOFF: If it's newsworthy? Wow, that's a that's a tough one, because I'm a reporter, not an editor. Right. So I'm a I've been on the editing side. And I think if someone brought to me, you know, there was a sexual assault here. You know, everything needs to be qualified. It's an alleged sexual assault until it's proven right. And so either criminally or civilly and the burden of proof in a civil court is much different than in a criminal court. So I would say newsworthiness, I mean, it's happening what every second of every day. So it doesn't have to be some celebrity case. It doesn't have to be some horrific crime. The enterprise investigative reporting that I do, I like to see, is there some broader impact that this can shed light on to grab more audience and to give more contacts? I don't think necessarily that every sexual assault is like every shooting. Except for of course, you know, you'll see the cases of homicide almost every homicide is covered, at least locally, and not in places like Chicago and places like that, where I also work. But you can't cover every single one because not every single one is going to be reported. And that's that's important for an audience to keep in mind. Right. Is that for every one that is reported, how many go unreported? So the newsworthiness may be the circumstance and maybe the age of the victim. It may be if it's telling of a broader story.

MEYERPETER: Okay, yeah. And are you given any editor guidelines? For a sexual violence story?

FERKENHOFF: Yes, but I can't reveal them. Only because their company policies and so forth, so I probably get fired today. But, I mean, generally speaking, the victim needs to be cared for as a victim, right? So unless that victim wants to come forward, you never name a rape victim and a

story unless that victim comes forward and comes forward for a good reason. Good Reason being, you know, the victim who came forward and the story that I did, for example, telling of a broader trend, or broader impediment to getting justice. If it's, I mean, obviously, in all cases involving juveniles, you would never name a victim no matter what I wouldn't. I mean, I would impress upon my editors, that even if a child had victims say a 13 year old came forward, and it was a boy or girl and they wanted to speak, we still should shield the victim because the brain doesn't mature fully taught to 25 years old. So what if that child has regrets, as they get older, for letting their name be out there and be the victim of a sexual assault?

MEYERPETER: That makes sense.

FERKENHOFF: Yeah, but this is a it's a tug of war that's been going on for decades, right? I mean, still going on. In terms of what should be used, what shouldn't be used when cases to cover or cases not to cover? But typically speaking, if it's a one off story, that you're not going to follow through the court systems, etc? Why put this the victim through the pain of even reading that story in the first place? Unless you're gonna make the commitment to follow that story through the court system? I don't know if that makes sense. But yeah, you know, are there follow ups to do? And are you going to stick with it?

MEYERPETER: Yeah, for sure. Um, is there like a certain? So like, what kind of language is typically used in these stories? Is there language that you try to avoid? Is there language that you typically will always use? I'm thinking, in previous interviews, I've heard them talk about the difference between using survivor and victim type of thing. You know what I mean?

FERKENHOFF: Yeah, um, since that's been covered, I'll just skip to the term I mean, rape and sexual assault, those are actual charges, right? So those are actual types of crime. That can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. So you got to be very careful in the law. A, if someone comes

forward and says they've been raped, and so and so has been charged, are charged with what were they charged with rape? Or were they charged with sodomy? Were they charged with assault or sexual assault? Were they charged with sexual assault and battery? So you have to be very careful about the language I think, because and this is particularly in the case when victims do come forward. Because rape conjures up images in people's heads sexual assault can conjure up many images in people's heads, sodomy conjures up a different image. So you got to be very careful, because if you're putting a name to it, in those rare cases that you do, um, people are gonna look at that person who may know the person and imagine what happened to them, even if they're not willing to share their stories. So you got to be extremely choosy in your language.

MEYERPETER: For sure, yeah, that's an angle that no one's taken yet. So, I appreciate that. How involved if at all, is the victim in the release of the story? Like are you working on the story? Yeah. Are you ever in contact with them? Are they informed or?

FERKENHOFF: Yes, I mean, in my work, I mean, personally, yes. I because I tend to do longer stories now. Back when I covered criminal justice, like on a daily or even hourly basis, the charge hit, you wrote x story. Whether you can reach the bed From or not, because it's news and it's and I hate gross in the conversation by the competitive nature of the business. But that is a factor, right? And it's a sick factor to consider. But if, you know in Chicago, I worked for the Tribune and at the Sun Times was going to write about a sexual assault. And you weren't going to write about a sexual assault and you had to justified your editor why we're not writing about it. So but in these longer stories that I do, yes, every effort is made to reach the victim. But as for the say, so on whether a story gets publish, editorially speaking, you know, all news organizations like to consider themselves independent, and making judgments and sound news judgments on their own. So the same could be said for you know, a murder victim's family,

please don't write about this murder. I don't want to read it again. Wow, it happened. It affects the community. And a sexual assault, for example, a lot of the people are predators. And they'll prey on many more men, women, boys, girls. So it's a community alert as well as an individual story.

MEYERPETER: Definitely. And what would you say is typically the intended message of the story, like the goal of releasing a story?

FERKENHOFF: That. The community alert. The beware. USA Today is not a sensationalist newspaper, in my mind, and I think to most Americans minds, USA Today, and its properties are not big on sensationalism. So stay away from that, stick straight to the news and draw the narrow line and lock it, for sure.

MEYERPETER: And what information is typically included in these stories? I know you talked about not using the names of victims. But what about things like, age? I know you talked about how that can make a story newsworthy. Even, like sexual orientation, race, things like that, are any of those included in these types of stories?

FERKENHOFF: Um, good question, but multiple answers. I mean, race. Why? You know, if someone is attacking Asian women, in particular, then race becomes a component of the story that is that broader warning? Age, age is almost always included. I mean, I think that, you know, we've learned over the years, not to write a story for a story sake, but to serve an audience. And if you're really serving the audience, then you got to factor in everything that you mentioned, and does make a decision does factor, you know, like, the gender or the non gender. You know, does that need to be included? Maybe, depending on, you know, again, I hate to beat, you know, the same drum, but does it serve a purpose? To do that, and if it doesn't leave it out.

MEYERPETER: Yeah, that makes sense. And where does the information for the story typically come from?

FERKENHOFF: Um, obviously, and unfortunately, a lot of stories begin with a police notification. The good news about that is that you're getting the official version. So you have a narrative to start with. The bad news is you don't want the police controlling the narrative all the way through. So if you're on a tight deadline, the police version may just dictate what is written or what is broadcast. But any follow going back to my earlier point about are you going to stick with the story and follow through the courses excetera the narratives going to change, talk to the victim, find out from the alleged defender, you know, try to piece these things together on your own. But as for other details that may be included, like, for example, how growth broadcasts you need to get in your description of events, you know, and so forth. And I think the “what happened” can often be defined by the charge itself. But the scenario leading up to the “what happened” is oftentimes important, because it leads to MO and understanding the MO of the offender.

MEYERPETER: And is there anything that you would change about the way that these stories are covered?

FERKENHOFF: I think every story, I mean, I'm allowed to say this only because I'm doing it now. Or I'm grateful to be able to say this, because I'm doing it now is give it context. Without context. It's just a bunch of words that string together. And they may be factual, but they don't tell. They don't tell the audience of anything other than something terrible happened. If you can explain the what, when, and all the other questions. I mean, the biggest question that I always have with a story is why now, why are we telling the story now? And so what, why are we telling

the story? And if you can answer those questions in your head, then you have a story. If you can't, you've just got a, you know, a blotter item?

MEYERPETER: For sure. And do you feel that the current method of coverage is hurtful or harm, or is harmful or helpful for victims and the public?

FERKENHOFF: Um, the current model, um not being a victim, not being an offender. I can't say personally. But I know that people who have studied this issue, say that unless you're careful, you're doing more harm than good. And unless you're really reaching out and understanding the issue and giving it the broader context, and you're doing more harm than good, it's like something terrible happening to you or me today. Reading about it, and the next paper with no real analysis, or history or guidance or context or anything. It's just reliving the pain.

MEYERPETER: For sure. And is there anything else that you would like to add?

FERKENHOFF: I'd just like to reiterate something we talked about the very beginning, which is, it says it's just not covered enough. I don't think that police for their part, and this is me thinking I'm not working at a police department, but aren't doing enough to go out and find victims. You know, you can't sit around and wait for someone to get up the guts to come walk into your office. So not only do they have to be preventative, but they have to be proactive in finding the victim so they can find the offender so that you can actually make a dent and the incidence of

MEYERPETER: Absolutely. Well, that is all that I have for you. Okay, yeah, super quick, super easy.

FERKENHOFF: Yeah, well, good luck with everything. I'd love to see it.

MEYERPETER: Thank you so much. I'll be sure to send it. All right.

Annie Sweeney—The Chicago Tribune

MEYERPETER: All right, and we can go ahead and get started.

SWEENEY: Alright.

MEYERPETER: Let me minimize one of my windows so I can still see you when I'm talking to you. Oh, my goodness, I'm having a hard time today. Sometimes I'm just not very good at my computer. Okay. So, we'll go ahead and just start with the basics like your name with spelling and where you went to school and what you majored in.

SWEENEY: Okay, so my name is Annie Sweeney. That's A N N I E. Sweeney, S W E E N E Y. I went to the University of Missouri. I graduated there with a journalism degree. And then I did a degree at Trinity College in Dublin at the Irish School of Ecumenics. So the Irish School of Ecumenics was a degree that was certified by Trinity in peace studies.

MEYERPETER: Awesome. And what news organization do you currently work for?

SWEENEY: I am currently a reporter at the Chicago Tribune.

MEYERPETER: Awesome. All right. So like, How often would you say sexual violence is covered by the Chicago Tribune?

SWEENEY: Um, I don't know that I could, like, put a I don't know that. I could say how often it is because it's completely dictated in part well, that contradicts it's dictated in part by breaking news, right? If it's ever connected to something a crime that has happened or a criminal case going through court. So I, you know, I just without doing like a content search, and I'm, I didn't do that, but I could I don't know what your deadline is. But I'd be willing to try to see like, how often we write about it. Not as much as gun violence. I is one way, I would say for sure. That dominates a lot of the story of Chicago due to the volume of victims and incidents with that.

MEYERPETER: Okay. Yeah. Um, and what sort of factors determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?

SWEENEY: So the I, the first thing I thought of with that question was, of course, if there is a threat to the public, and then example of that, and these cases are not as common I, I would check this statistic. But my memory of covering this is that acquaintance sexual violence is far more common than stranger. I don't know if that's changed, but I would like so however, when it is a incident of a stranger, it's a threat to the public. So part of what our job is, is to educate people about that. So. So that is one thing. Sorry that I just didn't double checking the question, what makes it newsworthy, right. So I think that makes it newsworthy. But you know, the other maybe more subtle ways it's newsworthy is we have to look at how police in the criminal justice system respond to sexual violence. And I've written a couple of stories about that. I think that's definitely newsworthy because one thing that I have consistently heard is that victims, survivors are not believed. From the beginning, from the first interview, again, I've some of what I've written about his efforts to change that. So I can only hope that the system is getting better at responding. But it is a big system. And it's probably going to take a while. So I think those stories are most certainly newsworthy. And another example of of that would be we had a issue here in Chicago many years ago, about the testing of rape kits. There was a backlog. So so that was another story that kind of hit on how the system is responding that had to do with funding issues around that that had to do with priority. I mean, people making the testing a priority. So that's newsworthy, I think, for sure.

MEYERPETER: And I don't know if I sent you this question or not. Do you have any like editor guidelines when you're covering a sexual violence story?

SWEENEY: The one that is most common is that we do not identify survivors unless they you choose to. So that, to me is like one of the most prominent rules in journalism in many ways, right, that you don't identify them. So other than that, I guess some of the guidelines are not that I

guess, ultimately, in my career, they came from editors or mentors, but the, the the need, you know, to be sensitive and careful. I think all victims deserve that too. But certainly, in this case, it's in these types of cases, it's, it's perhaps more important on some level. Yeah.

MEYERPETER: And do you have a like, is there any specific language that's typically used in these stories? Some that you avoid? Or some that you are sure to include?

SWEENEY: How are so are you for the purpose of this? Defining sexual violence specifically to any? are you limiting it to any experiences? Because I'll answer that, in a way I think if I know a little bit more about,

MEYERPETER: um, I'm not including it, it sexual violence is kind of the umbrella term, though, like assault, rape, anything, you know what I mean?

SWEENEY: So how about prostitution?

MEYERPETER: No, that's interesting. See, now that I did not consider.

SWEENEY: okay, because when, because the question you asked was, have I changed? Or am I careful about how we use language and write about things? Was that it? Yes. Um, so I, I mentioned that because I am written a lot about trafficking, and okay, and prostitution, and where those two things intersect. And what I learned through reporting on this and working with organizations, was based on research into people who, who work as prostitutes, there is a very strong chance that they've been either coerced, or kind of forced into the work in some way, so early in my career, I think, calling someone a prostitute or writing it, like, so and so, a prostitute, you know, I have stopped using that language. And I will say things like, who works worked as a prostitute, or I might use sex trade, I know that that is often used. But the key there is, is not doing the labeling of she's a prostitute. He's a prostitute. Given what is very likely possibly going on in this person's life that I made, I can't know. And I think what I was educated about was that

that kind of labeling is damaging. And and I think also, as a journalist, I would say it's kind of more accurate, in some ways, just it's just as accurate to say, who worked as prostitute or worked in prostitution? Unless, of course, you know, they were trafficked. And then they're a trafficking victim. Right. So. So I would say that's one place where I had I was educated about it did kind of start to pay attention to for sure. As far as I tried to be sensitive when I interview people about the the the use of victim or survivor because of an I think, a few minutes ago, I stumbled over it a little bit with you. You know, when someone when a crime happens to a person, no matter what it is, they are a victim, right? And you and I, as a journalist, to intercept to write a story understand that. However, I'm also aware that, again, due to being educated by advocates, that these cases victim, I think, in some cases feels like a secondary kind of harming and I am always willing to listen to that and to try to write it in a way that doesn't harm anybody further, but can get the story across, right, so long as so long as people understand and I don't know, I think survivor is being used enough that I almost think it. readers do know what that means. So those would be the two times for sure.

MEYERPETER: And How involved is the survivor in the release of the story typically? Are they informed of that release?

SWEENEY: Yeah, every so every situation is different i No matter what kind of victim I'm dealing with, I am always going to make an effort to reach them. I shouldn't say always right, because every situation in journalism is so different, right? You have a different set of specs. And so I don't want to say that every single time I reach a victim that if I'm going to be telling their story in detail, and this is trying to inform the reader about what they experienced 100% I'm going to try to reach them. And invite them to be a part of the story. No, if this is, in the case of, say, a serial rapist, and I'm going to be writing about it anyway. It's very much to say I'm writing

about your case, you were one of the victims, anything you'd like to share with me participate in the story? Absolutely, they would be invited in. And I would make every effort to make that contact first.

MEYERPETER: Okay. And so what would you say? Typically, is the intended message of really like when you release these stories?

SWEENEY: Well, I think it depends on what it is right? It fits a story about a new training class at the Chicago Police Academy, that I went to observe, and it was taught by a detective and it was coming off this campaign cold start with believed for start with believing or something along the lines of that basically was saying, don't go into don't begin a sexual assault case, doubting it, you know, like, you wouldn't doubt it. If someone called up and said, Hey, I was just robbed in front of my house, somebody pulled the gun on me. I, you know, the whole point of this training was to say, believe it right? Like if anybody calls you to say that someone assaulted them, even if it is an acquaintance or a family member, like just believe them. So if I'm writing about that, the message there for me is, yeah, the city should know that the police department is trying to do better investigations. But I'm also trying to educate readers about this uncomfortable area where perhaps, victims of this one particular kind of crime don't always get believed. And why is that? And I think that's kind of part of our job is to get people checking themselves a little bit thinking about some assumptions they make. And that all adds to kind of the suit both better understanding and better policies, better laws, and really better treatment for victims and survivors. Right. Better understanding.

MEYERPETER: Definitely. And I'm sorry, do you have any other things?

SWEENEY: Well yeah that was one real specific example that you're asking about the why we report these right, or what's the goal of? Well, of course, the goal of reporting about a pattern is

to is to inform and allow the public to know what's going on so they can protect themselves. I think. It it, it could be a story. I have done stories about people who were repeat offenders who were not stopped. Try to explore why Where did the system break down there? What was the problem? I can't think of any other. Yeah. Okay. I think the goal, of course, big picture is to always to get the system to respond better. And whether that's a law or a new training class, or the police and the public being able to protect a neighborhood because there's someone at large there.

MEYERPETER: Yeah. For sure. What information is typically included in these stories in regards to the victim and the offender, yeah. situation, location. Yeah.

SWEENEY: Yeah, I think you want it to be as a Um, well, you need to, what is the public need to know like to about this, like the where are these happening? Like where or if it is the case of a serial rapist, if it's the victim often times, to me, what they can add to these stories is often the personal experience of being a victim and how they were treated or mistreated by the system, certainly by an attacker, but I think it's almost inherent that that kind of crime would be horrible, right? Like, I don't know that I need a person to walk me through too many details except you do want, you do want the story to be written in a way that keeps the readers engaged in reading. So there is a fine line there between too much and but I think I think you can manage that. And I think that's, if you are interviewing a victim, and they're going to be a part of a story that is something you should always be balancing out what does the public need to know about this?

And that's how you kind of make these decisions about what to include and what not to include?

MEYERPETER: For sure. Yeah, and where does the information for these stories typically come from?

SWEENEY: I think police reports, court records, advocates are immensely helpful advocate organizations who are trying to fix something in the system, change a law are, are really helpful. And they are also very helpful if you're ever interviewing survivors and victims, especially if they're connected to the person you are talking to. But even if they're not, they're the kind of subject matter experts on what that person is going through. So they're, they're a great resource if you're going to be doing any of this kind of reporting.

MEYERPETER: Yes, definitely. Um, and what, uh, what would you change about the way that these stories are covered?

SWEENEY: I'm gonna say that I do think we've evolved as a profession, not the tribune alone. But I do think we have evolved a lot to a little bit more sensitive place where I hope when we're writing about sexual violence, there is a bigger, broader mission here that it is not just to expose somebody's painful story, but it is to say, you know, there is a, there is something larger happening in society, whether it's they're not testing DNA kits, or we don't have police trained in how to properly conduct them. That there's something bigger going on here that we need to address. And I think I, I hope I you know, maybe your research is turned up examples. But I'd like to think that most stories are anchored to something like that, like something like, why are we doing this? And although I suppose it depends on how you're defining media as well, you know, you and, you know, probably better than I do the landscape of 24 hour news and, and can, you know, anyone bloggers, Facebook pages, anybody can be weighing in, and I think there's, there is probably an opportunity for some of these stories to get posted. I don't know if you'd call that reported, but posted or even reported by mainstream organizations. Because they will get people's attention. You know, I mean, it there. I think there probably is a risk there.

MEYERPETER: For sure. And do you feel that? I know you talked about how we've kind of evolved as a profession, but do you feel that the current method of coverage is harmful or helpful for victims in the public?

SWEENEY: That is an excellent question. Thank you. And I think a great reminder to anybody doing this, even as long as I have. That probably should be a question that you kind of start every story with, and I can't speak like I said, for every story and every A report that's done. But I think I certainly have an eye credit that, honestly, like I said to advocates and organizations who have always picked up the phone, always been willing to talk to me and explain to me what it feels like, from my perspective, but also offered me assurances that some of this stuff needs to get a public should know, there's the public should definitely know. And I'm gonna say, Yeah, I think we're doing a better job. I think we are I have to, I hope, if your research is looking at this kind of stuff, I certainly hope at least what the media I'm most familiar with, which is, you know, the more traditional I hope we are doing a better job by victims, I really do. And I'll go back to the example I gave you of the trafficking and the prostitution. I think it was easy for me to immediately understand that if someone is labeled is called a human trafficking victim like I get it that's terrible. A human should not be bought and sold in any way, shape, or form. But coming to understand that more subtly, that can be what's going on with prostitution. I think and it's not just me, I think I've seen this with other outlets. I think that's the kind of evolution you want to see in this where where there is more sensitivity, and then the acknowledgement of the research and the facts on the ground, you know.

MEYERPETER: And is there anything else that you would like to add that I didn't cover? Or do you think would be important to know?

SWEENEY: No, I think you had a very comprehensive list of questions.

MEYERPETER: thank you. Awesome. Well, that's it. That's all I have, easy peasy. Yeah, if I think of anything else, I'll be sure to reach out. But thank you so much for taking the time to do this and being a part of this. It's been difficult finding people to talk with for some reason.

SWEENEY: I think it's sometimes overwhelming when you're working. And I mean, it took me this long to connect with you. But I'm glad we did. Yeah, good luck. When are you a senior are you a graduate student?

MEYERPETER: I'm a graduate student, I'm actually trying to submit my defense by the end of the week, but I might have to postpone and, and give myself another week just to see if I can get any more people honestly. Yeah. You're my fifth. And my goal was 14. And boy, I've reached out to so many people who have...

SWEENEY: are you just doing journalists for these interviews? Or are you?

MEYERPETER: Yeah, and I've reached out to so many people, and I either get, like, no response, or they tell me that they're not interested or that they don't think that they'd be qualified.

SWEENEY: And you're doing national? Like you're talking to anybody anywhere? Yeah, let me think Kaitlyn, if there's I could also reach out to some Mizzou people that I'm still talking to and tell them they have to help you out.

MEYERPETER: I would really appreciate that.

SWEENEY: I can think of another. Do you if it's someone else from Chicago, is that okay?

MEYERPETER: It would be better if it was from different publications but I'm willing to talk with anybody.

SWEENEY: I just thought of somebody at the sun times that I might be able to tap, but they're Chicago. Yeah, let me give that some thought. And I'll try to send some your way.

MEYERPETER: Thank you so much. I really appreciate that, Annie.

SWEENEY: You bet.

MEYERPETER: You have a great rest of your day.

SWEENEY: You too.

MEYERPETER: And thank you so much

SWEENEY: Okay, take care.

MEYERPETER: You too, alright, bye bye.

APPENDIX III: FIELD NOTES

Week 1: June 6, 2022 – June 10, 2022

Professional Report:

Veritas Summer Nights starts next Tuesday, so a lot of time was spent preparing for our summer services. The beginning of the week was spent creating designs and planning the next nine Instagram posts that promote Summer Veritas. I was given the task of designing a t-shirt for our students who will be here this summer and getting 100 of them ordered and ready for pick up by the end of the week. I had to create a large sign and QR code as well as a looping video of the best videos I made as an intern this semester to play on a loop for Summer Welcome tabling. I worked the firsts two tabling shifts for Summer Welcome. We had our first strategy meeting for Camp Veritas (coming up in September). It is often difficult to get a lot done when all of staff is in on meetings, but we were able to assign tasks and set deadlines for preparation projects. I was assigned promotion and design work which includes social media promotion, campus promotion, apartment promotion, camp booklet, camp t-shirt design, promotion videos, and theme. We intend to have all this planned and ready by the end of July.

Week 2: June 13, 2022 – June 17, 2022

Professional Report:

This week we started weekly staff meetings on Monday mornings. In those meetings we go over plans for the week and go over what we read in the book we are reading together, *The Lord and His Prayer* by N.T. Wright. The first “Veritas Summer Nights” was on Tuesday this week. I spent most of Tuesday morning creating social media posts for that afternoon to remind students about the event, creating table signs, and picking up prints. We started setting up for the event

after lunch and finished getting everything ready by 3:30. During the event I am responsible for taking pictures/videos and engaging with students. Wednesday is when I go through all of the photos I took and edit them. I also create an info graphic that relates to the message given on Tuesday for students who couldn't go that gets put up on our Instagram, @veritascomo. The rest of the week is spent creating posts for next week. I also created new tri-fold brochures for ACRA summer welcome tabling. Once I finish all of my tasks for the day, I spend the rest of my time working on support raising.

Project Report:

This week I reached out to nine different journalists via email and heard back from three of them so far. I plan to send follow ups to the journalists I haven't heard from early next week. I did my first interview on Friday with a journalist from the Washington Times. The other two journalists responded with some questions about my project. They wanted to know more about how I was determining political affiliation and how I was defining sexual violence in my research. I am waiting to hear back from them to see if they are ready and comfortable doing an interview. I think that next time I reach out to more journalists I will include more information about my research. I am hoping to get more interviews scheduled as soon as possible so I can get them done and focus on analyzing them and categorizing the information.

Week 3: June 20, 2022 – June 24, 2022

Professional Report:

This week one of my supervisors was out of town so the office looked a little different than normal. I completed my first "section" on Instagram (a block of 9 posts on your profile). I'll be

the first to admit that it didn't turn out how I originally envisioned because the presets for our photos changed since last summer and I had to use last summers photos for the first half of the posts. The colors didn't match the way I wanted to. For this section, I will have consistent presets for the images since they are being taken each week at Veritas Summer Nights. I am trying something new for this section and I'm excited to see how it impacts post performance for this section. We started planning campus events for the fall and student meet and greets for later this summer. I created some website calendar graphics for the summer events coming up and will get the fall event graphics started once we finalize what we are doing and our approach for those events' promotion.

Project Report:

This week I heard back from three more journalists. Two of the journalists told me that their editor isn't allowing them to converse with me anymore and that they will not be doing the interview. Another journalist from the Denver Post was curious as to how long the interviews would last and which political party the Denver Post was considered. I responded answering her questions a couple of days ago and haven't heard back. I got permission from my committee to omit the portion of my proposal involving political affiliation when requesting interviews moving forward. I think this will increase my chances of getting a positive and willing response from journalists. Thankfully I was prepared that this may happen, and I'm not surprised by this finding. I also decided to document the email responses I get back from journalists when they can't participate because I feel like this is worth noting in my research. I'll decide when I am further along in my research if this is worth including, but for now I am keeping the emails in my notes.

Week 4: June 27, 2022 – July 1, 2022

Professional Report:

My supervisor is back in the office so things felt back to normal this week. We have finally gotten some solid ideas and plans going for Camp Veritas in the fall which means I can start working on more branding and strategy for how the weekend will look. We also got more of a foundation for some of our fall welcome week events and I have been given the green light for branding. The challenge this week was figuring out a starting point for some of the branding elements we are using like wristbands, individual pizza slice boxes, connection lanyards for our staff and leadership, and unique signage for events. I'm also brainstorming on how to get invitations to students new to campus and students living off campus who aren't connected with Veritas yet.

Project Report:

I'm feeling nervous about the progress I've made on the research. I still haven't gotten any more interviews. I'm hoping that I get a better response with the new email I've drafted for the next round of journalists. Follow ups on previous emails have gotten few responses. I'm also considering reaching out over the phone as well so I can get a more direct response. With it already being July I am starting to pursue subjects with more urgency. I'm out of town for the Fourth of July right now which has made things a little more challenging as well. I think that a sense of urgency is something I need. Hopefully this will encourage me to be more adamant with journalists. I'm really excited to get more interviews since the first one went so well.

Week 5: July 4, 2022 – July 8, 2022

Professional Report:

We are moving forward with even more planning for the fall semester. We were able to get events tentatively scheduled through November 1 which is going to be a big help for us when August comes around. We have one more week of Summer Nights which means my weeks are going to look different. There will be a lot of working ahead on event promotion and sermon series branding for the fall and spring semester. I already started making the logo and branding material for our first event on August 21 called Last Summer Night which will take place on campus as a way for us to meet students and get our name out there before our first Tuesday night gathering in the fall. Last year we had close to 500 students come to Last Summer Night, so we are planning to see just as many this year.

Project Report:

Responses have still been slow. I have continued reaching out and following up with the journalists I originally emailed in hopes of getting a response. I couldn't send out new emails yet, so I am going to do that at the beginning of next week. I have started putting together the actual document that I will be submitting. I combined all the information that I have available into the document and created a table of contents and title page for the project. With still only one official interview done I already have 34 pages in the document. I am going to be dedicating most of my time during the week to reaching out to journalists in any way that I can. If I can get the interviews done within the next three weeks, I think I will be in good shape. Transcribing and organizing the information from the first interview I did was easier than I anticipated because I chose to do structured interviews and I know exactly where the information I need is at.

Week 6: July 11, 2022 – July 15, 2022

Professional Report:

Summer meetings on Tuesday nights are officially over. The last meeting with our students was a big success. We managed to still get first-time students in our last week and were able to direct them to our upcoming fall events. I focused my time this week on Last Summer Night branding and preparation. I made the designs for our print graphics (food signs, sandwich board signs, lanyard cards, connect with us signs, etc.), t-shirt design, the slideshow graphic for the student center, and the graphic we will be using for paid promotion on Facebook and Instagram. I also get started on a mood board for Camp Veritas. I also planned out the next 9 Instagram posts, cleaned up the Digital Relationships Dropbox folders and organized the content in them by semester, and started planning out roles for my returning student volunteers and creating an application for students interested in joining DR Team.

Project Report:

I sent out four new emails to journalists that don't mention the political affiliation portion of my research and already got a response! I have an interview scheduled with a journalist from the Denver Post this Wednesday. It was interesting to see the difference in the way she responded to me compared to the response I got from one of her co-workers just a few weeks ago (and haven't heard from since). It is only one response, but I think this new email template is going to get a much better response rate than the first one. I am going to wait until Tuesday to see if I get any negative responses and adjust accordingly. If I get a good response or no response, I will move forward and send the email to the rest of the journalists I have on my list. I wanted to "test the

waters” with this email before I sent it out to all the journalists again because of the poor response I got the first time. It could have put me in a tough situation if I hadn’t had multiple journalists picked out from the publications I chose to contact, and I don’t want to have to go looking for subjects this far into the process after I already picked out so many.

Week 7: July 18, 2022 – July 22, 2022

Professional Report:

I have had more meetings this week than I have ever had. Plans and prepping for first semester are in full swing and I am involved in nearly all the planning meetings because I have to design all of the event promotion for them. We held meetings about Last Summer Night, Tuesday at Traditions, the first Tuesday Night at The Crossing campus, Camp Veritas, Small Group sign ups, V Fresh freshmen get togethers, January Greek Life service trip to Harmons Jamaica, and we even touched on the Spring Break trip to Harmons Jamaica as well. With all this information I was able to create social media calendars for August and September planning out all our paid promotions, posts, stories, announcements, and Instagram reels. On top of this, I also reached the minimum requirement of monthly donations in support raising which means I am able and ready to start full time as soon as I complete my project.

Project Report:

I had another interview that went great. I am only two interviews in and I can already recognize similarities and differences between them. I transcribed the second interview and put both transcriptions into the project document. I also went through and highlighted the information from the transcriptions that is important and useful for comparing interviews and determining

methods for each political affiliation. I have the layout of my project set and I know that most of the work is going to be these interviews and that completing the project document will be self-explanatory and (for lack of a better word) easy to do. I sent out another round of emails and some follow ups as well and I am waiting to hear back from them.

Week 8: July 25, 2022 – July 29, 2022

Professional Report:

I feel like I am doing a lot of the same things this week that I have been doing. Lots of preparation and design work for upcoming events. I scheduled and set up my first paid ad on my own for our Facebook and Instagram. I am excited to see how those perform over the next 15 days. We have 4 more paid ads going up on our social media in August. These ads are going to tell me a lot about how to reach our target audience and what call to actions work best on them. When I started this position, I was told to create a budget for the Digital Relationships team, and I made sure to include plenty of money and resources for paid promotion. I think this tool is going to be beneficial for Veritas and I hope that we see larger turnout at our events in the fall.

Project Report:

I heard back from one journalist this week and have an interview scheduled on Monday with them. I sent out more emails this week and will be following up with them late next week in hopes of getting as many scheduled as I can. I am excited to see how the first two interviews will compare to the answers I get on Monday. It feels like I am running low on time, and I am starting to get nervous about getting interviews done in time. I'm definitely reaching out to people with some more urgency than I was in week one. The good news is that I am getting good quality

answers and information in the interviews I've done so far, and I anticipate that continuing throughout this process. I have to make sure that I get even numbers of conservative representation and liberal representation in the interviews otherwise I won't have a reliable study.

Week 9: August 1, 2022 – August 5, 2022

Professional Report:

I have officially completed the support raising process of my job which means I am able to spend even more time on creative work. My boss was out of town again this week so at the beginning of next week I am going to run through all of the graphics I created with him. I should get the "go ahead" to start ordering prints, shirts, and other materials needed for the events coming up which will be a big help in preparing for these events. I have had a lot more "normal" work to do this week like budgeting, sending lots of emails, putting in website edit requests, and scheduling out Facebook ads for the next month. This part of my job is not as exciting but is important in order for me to stay up to date and keep things organized.

Project Report:

This week I had another interview that went well. I feel like these interviews are giving me the information I anticipated; most journalists have the same routines that they use when covering sexual violence. It is very focused on the victim and keeping them anonymous, safe, and in control of the situation as much as possible. I didn't hear back from anyone new this week so I sent follow ups to anyone I hadn't heard back from over the weekend. I don't expect to hear back from them until Monday at the earliest. I have two more rounds of emails that I can send out as

well, so I am not too stressed about getting enough interviews right now. I'll send out another round of emails on Monday next week.

Week 10: August 8, 2022 – August 12, 2022

Professional Report:

Meetings have been picking up again. We started up coaching meetings this week. These typically occur monthly with your supervisor so they can keep track of what you're working on and see how you are doing with work-life balance. Because I am new and my job consists of so many different elements, my supervisor has requested to meet with me every 2 weeks. I had a few stressful days this week. It seemed like things weren't linking up quite right for our social media planning and our event calendar, so I had to rearrange our plans for social media. This and next week I am finishing up the designs for our welcome week events, placing printing orders, placing shirt orders, and meeting with my team about last minute design needs. I am starting to figure out what my weeks look like. I have noticed that by Thursday (the end of the work week) I am creatively burnt out since I have been designing for four days straight. I am going to try doing less design heavy work on Thursdays to keep me from getting overwhelmed and frustrated with myself over my creative block.

Project Report:

Still no word from other journalists about interviews. My original goal was to get 14 interviews, but I think that I am now hoping to get five or six interviews since I am having a hard time getting responses. I think I am comfortable with this only because I feel like the rejection emails are also valuable data. I think it shows that people may not be willing to discuss sexual violence

and that they aren't comfortable with being involved in interviews when political affiliation is mentioned. I'm also comfortable with having less interviews because the information I have gathered so far is all consistent. This obviously isn't ideal but should be doable. I am going to keep following up with people and hope to hear from them within the next two weeks so I have ample time to complete remainder of the professional project.

Week 11: August 15, 2022 – August 19, 2022

Professional Report:

The next two weeks are the busiest weeks of the year for Veritas. My days are going to consist of last-minute designing and printing, setting up and tearing down equipment for tabling, four hour tabling shifts for two days in a row, and our Last Summer Night event is on Sunday. We will be working on setting up the event all day long. My supervisors told me to prepare to be outside and on my feet from 11 in the morning until 11 in the evening. At the event I will be delegating my three student photographers, and I will be taking videos of the event for a recap video to be posted the following Sunday. I will also be responsible for connecting with students and getting to know them as well as helping them to figure out their next steps in our ministry whether that be marking their calendars for our first Tuesday Night on Traditions Plaza, signing up for a small group, or signing up for our Impact class to start serving.

Project Report:

I feel like I'm at a standstill with my project and it is starting to get a tad stressful. Because I am so busy this week and next week, I am going to have a hard time being available to work on my project. Since I am putting in so many hours this week and next week, I will be able to take a

couple days off to focus only on my project. To add to the stress, I still haven't had any luck with interviews. I am going to follow up with all my potential interviewees again this week for one more big push with them. If I still get nothing, I am moving on to reporting professors at the journalism school and hoping they can get me some connections with a few more people. I want to give myself two weeks to work on constructing the paper and analyzing all the information I've collected. The last few weeks have gone by really quickly, so I am starting to feel the pressure.

Week 12: August 22, 2022 – August 26, 2022

Professional Report:

After the insane week I had last week and the beginning of this week, I spent most of my week going through footage and photos from the event. I created a recap video of the Last Summer Night event that will go out on social media on Sunday. We had our first Tuesday Night on Traditions Plaza this week that I took pictures at. The recap pictures I posted to our Instagram of Tuesday Night are the best performing pictures we have had in months. We have gotten over 400 likes on that post, which is about 200 more likes than usual. We have also gained over 80 followers since Sunday putting us over 2,130 followers. It is crazy to think at the beginning of the summer we were hovering around 2,010 followers. I am excited for next Tuesday Night because we will be at The Crossing again and we are having a big party beforehand for our students.

Project Report:

This week I was waiting on hearing back from journalists about getting some more interviews and I am happy to report that I heard back from two more people. It turns out that telling people you are in desperate need of interviews really encourages them to respond to you. I had one interview today (Friday) that went well, and he was the first male journalist I interviewed for this project. He was very excited about the topic and wants me to send him my final project when I finish. I have another interview scheduled for early next week as well. I would like to get at least one more interview before I start analyzing all the data together. So far, I haven't found any difference between the coverage of sexual violence based on political affiliation, so I think the majority of my study is going to be focused on the current practices of these publications and determining from those practices what the best possible method for coverage is.

Week 13: August 29, 2022- September 2, 2022

Professional Report:

In just one week we have increased our Instagram follower count by over 40 followers. I decided to take a look at our Instagram insights for the last month and I was happy with the numbers I found. Since the beginning of August, we have had 126,575 impressions (+325%), 4,157 profile visits (+273%), and 211 website clicks (+211%). We had our first Tuesday Night at The Crossing this week and had a turnout of 427 students. The event we held before our normal Tuesday Night meeting was a big success. We ended up selling the rest of our merch from last semester and made over \$800. Our students had a lot of fun using the dunk tank we rented, taking pictures with friends, playing volleyball and spike ball, and eating dinner together. Now that the big first week events are completed, things in the office will slow down and I'll be able to focus on my to-do list instead of completing last minute assignments. Next Sunday we are

doing traditional communion for the first time in nearly three years, and the following Sunday we are hosting Bob Goff.

Project Report:

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get one of the interviews I planned this week. My dog ended up sick and in the vet most of the afternoon and I forgot to email the participant and ask to reschedule. I emailed them apologizing and explaining the situation but haven't heard anything back from them. My plan to get another interview is to ask someone I already interviewed if they know of anyone who would be willing or excited about this opportunity that I can speak with. I think I will ask my first interviewee and the man I interviewed last Friday since I have both of their phone numbers and they were both excited about the research I was doing. I am going to start finishing up as much as I can with the paper until I get the last interviews I need.

Week 14: September 5, 2022 – September 9, 2022

Professional Report:

This week we had a smaller turnout than our first Tuesday Night at The Crossing. We had about 340 students in attendance, which is above average for previous years despite being a drop from week one. This week was focused a lot on getting back into routine of posting the sermons and highlight clips to our YouTube channel, getting those sermons up on to our website and posted to our podcast. I was also working on getting in routine of our regular weekly posting for the week. These posts include stories of the setlist from Tuesday, stories of any announcements we made on Tuesday, posting recap photos, posting the highlight clip from the sermon, and posting the reel of our music team that goes out every week. Last semester we heavily focused on finding a

way to regularly share videos of our music team, so this semester I want to focus on building interaction with our sermon highlight videos. I noticed in the past that the videos of our music team perform significantly better on Instagram than our sermon highlights, and I believe part of that was due to the quality of the highlights. I decided to change up how the highlights look so they are more interesting to watch, and so far, our first trial of the new highlight video format is performing twice as well as last years!

Project Report:

I have gotten some connections from a few people I have interviewed and reached out to those journalists to see if they are able to talk with me in the next week or two. I also reached out to the “Mizzou Mafia” Facebook Group Admin, Randy Reeves, and asked if they would be able to connect me with some alum who are able to help me out. I haven’t heard back from any of the people I have reached out to, but I am going to keep pushing until the last minute. I was really hoping to be done with interviews by week 14 but I am still hoping for more responses. I have decided that I will push for interviews until the end of week 15 and then I am going to focus the majority of my time on finishing the analysis. If I happen to get an interview in that last week of work then I will definitely make time for it. I am going to look for anyone else that may be able to help me and reach out to them. I feel like after that I have done all that I can and all I can do is wait for a response until a follow up is appropriate. I’ll be working on the portions of the professional analysis and the self-evaluation that I can until I hear back from people.

Week 15: September 12, 2022 – September 16, 2022

Professional Report:

It feels like I hardly did any work this week compared to the previous 3 weeks. I'm still working the normal 30 hours that are required of me, but since I was working closer to 50 hours per week a few weeks ago, this seems light. I have had some meetings this week with people outside of my ministry within the church about social media and design. Word has gotten around that I am good at what I do, and other ministries want to hear my thoughts on how they run their ministries social media and any ideas I have for them. This week I began making the camp booklet for Camp Veritas. We still aren't sure what information is going to go in the booklets quite yet. To work ahead and get some stuff designed and ready, I took a booklet from last year as a reference to help me plan out the pages so hopefully all I'll have to do is fill in the information I'm given and maybe add a few more design elements. I also worked on getting shirts ordered for camp, stickers and memory cards designed, and we launched a Instagram giveaway for people who are signed up for camp. My idea with the giveaway was that it would hopefully motivate students to get signed up sooner since we have had a bunch of students sign up on the last possible day and that doesn't give our printers enough time to get all the shirts we need to us. We were able to get 20 more sign ups so far because of the giveaway and we were able to give more shirt sizes to our printers which was a big help to them.

Project Report:

I had an interview planned with a journalist for this morning and then she emailed me last minute to tell me she had a meeting about criminal justice reports come up and she couldn't make it and we would need to do it later. I let her know I can be available whenever today but never heard back. I was able to get ahold of her this evening and got a response. We are going to make up the interview on Sunday afternoon. I'm really glad I was able to get one more interview. Five still

isn't the ideal number, but it is better than four. I have continuously followed up with more journalists at republican leaning publications and have yet to hear anything or I've been rejected. I wish I would have been able to get more information from republican publications, but I also think that the lack of response can be used as information in my findings. I am willing to get interviews up until the very last minute of this project if that means my research is more credible. It feels like a long shot but even just two more conservative publications would be beneficial. I'm going to keep trying, and in the meantime, I am going to get as much written for my professional analysis and findings that I can. As more information comes in, I will add/adjust my writing.

Week 16: September 19, 2022 – September 23, 2022

Professional Report:

This week was pretty similar to the last week. I am working on more Camp Veritas stuff. This week was getting more done in the camp booklets, but I am meeting a bit of a barrier because I can't get much done in the book until my co-workers get me the information I need to go into the books. In the meantime, I worked on designing the last sticker which has been harder than I anticipated. I am having a hard time coming up with something relevant that students would want to display on their water bottle or laptop. I got drawstring bags designed and ordered and we made a decision on how we would be labeling the bags. We decided on round pins. I went ahead and designed the paper that will go into the pin containers. This took me quite a while because I had to write out every student's name that is coming to camp so far (137). I also have a lot of books I need to read for work, so I spend my free time doing that a lot.

Project Report:

I decided to extend my deadline for a week or two so I could have more time to analyze the fifth interview I got on Sunday and potentially get another interview. I am not having much luck getting any more interviews, but I reached out to Annie, my most recent interview, because she told me she would get me in contact with a few of her connections and have them talk with me. I am finishing up the paper next week, and if I don't get any more interviews by the end of the week, I will likely call it and submit my defense shortly after that. I am pretty discouraged by the lack of response, especially from the conservative leaning publications. I was only able to get an interview from one person from that category. I know that this hurts my credibility in the research I am doing, and I am going to have to put that I don't have enough information to conclude there being any difference between the conservative and liberal publications coverage of sexual violence. Based on what I have learned from my interviewees, the coverage of sexual violence is typically the same amongst publications and none of them have a set way to go about covering these kinds of stories.

APPENDIX V: SELF EVALUATION

At the very beginning of choosing my research topic, I was met with a lot of excitement from professors and peers. This, in turn, made me really excited for the project to begin. I was ready to dedicate a lot of time to this research and was thrilled to be researching something I genuinely care about. From the people I talked to I gathered that comparing coverage based on political affiliation wasn't something that had been done before. Truthfully, I didn't think I would find any staggering differences between the ways either side covers sexual violence. Going into this research I believed I would find that most publications have very similar practices when covering such a sensitive topic. Because of this, I prepared most of my research to be about the issues with current coverage, the parts of coverage that are helpful, and determining the best practices for all journalists to use.

I anticipated having a difficult time finding people to interview because of the discomfort that comes with discussing sexual violence of any kind. I also anticipated having a difficult time determining the political affiliation of publications. Both of these ended up not being an issue or the underlying reason for an issue.

The most challenging portion of my research was getting journalists to agree to an interview. In total, I emailed nearly 40 journalists that I felt would be a good fit for this research. I was met with a lot of questions when I received a response. I first believed these questions were due to me not being clear enough when explaining my research and that I needed to be more thorough. That, however, was not the case. Every question I was asked had to do with the political affiliation portion of my research. Any mention of political leaning led to radio silence from journalists. I was told on multiple occasions that journalists were "not allowed to be in contact with me anymore" after advising their editors. I wish I would have done a better job

anticipating this. Journalists are dedicated to having no political preference. It is a weakness of publications to show any political leaning. This isn't unusual or unknown, so I was frustrated that I hadn't considered omitting this portion of my study earlier on when asking for interviews.

I was glad that I was able to adjust my proposal to journalists so they would be more comfortable discussing this with me. The bottom line is, I don't believe political affiliation has anything to do with how sexual violence is covered. And I was more concerned with finding out how publications are covering sexual violence and determining a more effective way to cover this in news media. I think that if I would have omitted the political portion of my study from the first round of interviews I sent out, I would have gotten a much better and higher response rate. I believe the reason I was only able to get 5 interviews is due to the unwillingness to participate in a study that references political affiliation. Thankfully I was able to get the information that I needed. The journalists I interviewed were very knowledgeable and had a lot of insightful things to say. It would have been a better study if I had gotten all 14 interviews like I had planned.

Overall, the results of this study reflected my original theory. I could not find any notable differences between conservative and liberal news media coverage of sexual violence. Both sides had harmful and helpful practices of coverage that can be used to help determine the best way to cover sexual violence in the news media.

APPENDIX V: ORIGINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

Conservative Media Coverage vs. Liberal Media Coverage of Sexual Violence

Professional Project Proposal by Katelyn Meyerpeter

ABSTRACT

News reports on sexual violence in the United States of America have been known to cause more harm than good. In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to interpret the differences between the ways Liberal and Conservative publications report on sexual violence. These findings will inform journalists of the most effective and respectful way to report on sexual violence.

Key Words: Sexual Violence, Liberal, Conservative, Journalist, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Media are one of the most powerful influences in shaping public perceptions about crime and victimization (Chermak, 1995; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002), the framing of gender and violence, direct correlation between time spent consuming mass media info and acceptance of its images and stereotypes—media frames what we see as social problems, who is a legitimate victim, what is good or bad, etc.

Our voice matters, and the way we talk about and present issues has a significant impact on the views and beliefs of our readers. This study will bring light to the ways that political preference potentially impacts the way that sexual violence is covered. By studying the differences and the ways the current practices have been harmful or helpful, this study aims to

determine the best way for all journalists to report on sexual violence—a way that is respectful and appropriate to victims and readers.

RQ1: What are the major similarities and differences in the coverage of sexual violence between conservative and liberal publications?

RQ2: In what ways is the coverage harmful or helpful to readers and victims?

RQ3: How can all journalists better cover sexual violence in an appropriate and respectful way?

PROFESSIONAL COMPONENT

Over the summer while I complete my professional project, I have a new job I will be starting. I will begin working 30 hours a week for The Crossing, a Presbyterian church in Columbia that will lead to a full-time position once my masters is complete in September. The role I was given is the digital relations specialist for the church's college ministry, Veritas. I previously interned for Veritas in assisting the former digital relations specialist and was promoted to take over that position starting in June. The new role gives me a lot more responsibility within the ministry. My job will consist of creating graphic design, photo, video, and website content for Veritas. I will take over running all social platforms for the ministry as well. On top of my visual responsibilities, I am also responsible for running a team of student leaders in which I will delegate assignments, teach them new skills, and hold weekly meetings with them to go over new projects and goals for the week. I am also expected to attend and present at weekly staff meetings, help plan and set up any events or trips we are taking, attend all staff monthly meetings, and take on new administrative responsibilities. Part of having a full-

time position at The Crossing means I will be responsible for, what they call, support raising. The reason the church is able to employ so many people is through the concept of raising our salary. This is a big responsibility at the start of a new job at The Crossing. I will be responsible for recruiting a support team who support the ministry and give financially. It is required that I raise \$2,000 per month at the least. Once my support team is fully recruited, I am expected to send regular updates to supporters about the ministry, meet with existing supporters, and be recruiting new supporters throughout the year.

DEFINITIONS

Sexual Violence: sexual activity when consent is not obtained or freely given. It is a serious public health problem in the United States that profoundly impacts lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being (CDC, 2022).

Sexual Assault: sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include attempted rape, fondling or unwanted sexual touching, forcing the performance of sexual acts, penetration of the victim's body also known as rape (RAINN, 2022).

Rape: a form of sexual assault often used as a legal definition to specifically include sexual penetration without consent (RAINN, 2022).

Serial Rape: The most sensationalized form of rape. Describes a series of rapes committed on different occasions by the same perpetrator. This term is rarely used to describe marital or date rape, even though these forms of rape can also happen repeatedly. Instead, a serial rapist has multiple victims.

Multiple Perpetrator/Gang Rape: When two or more perpetrators act together to sexually assault the same victim.

Stranger Rape: Rape or sexual assault perpetrated by someone unknown to the survivor.

Blitz Sexual Assault: A perpetrator rapidly and brutally assaults a victim with no prior contact. Typically occurring at night in a public area.

Acquaintance Rape: An umbrella term used to describe sexual assaults in which the survivor and the perpetrator are known to each other, whether by passing acquaintance or someone the survivor knows intimately. This is the most common form of rape.

Force: physical pressure, emotional coercion, psychological intimidation, manipulation, or threats to coerce a victim into non-consensual sex (RAINN, 2022).

Framing Theory: the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong & Druckman, n.d.)

Agenda Setting: the idea that there is a correlation between the emphasis that mass media places on issues and how important audiences find them to be (Aroustamian, 2019).

Priming Theory: the idea that media drives public discourse of issues in a psychological way (Aroustamian, 2019).

Psychological Frames: spatial and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages that operates as a form of metacommunication (Arowolo, 2017).

Periodicals: a magazine or newspaper published at regular intervals (consider the source)

Revictimization: survivors of sexual violence are at a greater risk of experiencing victimization again later in life (Aroustamian, 2019).

Rape Culture: and popular culture. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women's rights and safety (Marshall University, 2022).

Perpetrators: any person who commits a sexual assault, regardless of whether the victim is a minor or an adult.

Survivor: an individual who is going or has gone through the recovery process of sexual assault; additionally, this word is used when discussing the short- and long-term effects of sexual violence (Sexual Assault Kit Initiative).

Victim: someone who has recently experienced a sexual assault; additionally, the word is commonly used when discussing a crime or when referencing the criminal justice system (Sexual Assault Kit Initiative).

Political Affiliation: the state of belonging to or endorsing any political party.

Partisan: a strong supporter of a party, cause, or person.

Non-Partisan: not having a strong opinion or support of a political party, cause, or person.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why Media Coverage of Sexual Violence is an Issue of Relevance

The portrayal of sexual violence in the media has contributed to its normalization in society. This is because the media acts as a socializing agent for social behaviors (Egen et al., 2020). The medias portrayal of all issues, not just sexual violence, have shown to influence, reinforce, or modify the way that audiences react and respond to those issues. Society has a warped understanding of the frequency of sexual violence, who is affected by this crime, what it

truly looks like, and the impact journalistic writing of sexual violence has on survivors which has led to reports of sex crimes being a normalized part of the daily paper (Carter, 1998).

What gets published in the media all comes down to, what is the most entertaining to read about? What is the most dramatic story I can tell? Journalists have created a “hierarchy of crime” to help them identify what should be reported on and what isn’t considered “newsworthy.” Of all the crimes, murder is considered to be the most serious offense and is therefore the priority for news coverage. But when we look at police report statistics, murder, specifically homicide, is the rarest crime to be reported. But the frequency of sexual violence isn’t reflected in journalistic writing (Carter, 1998). Considering that reporting the rarest crimes aligns with the definition of news, this doesn’t seem to be an issue. Within the literature, Carter discusses that journalists’ role of informing the public is hindered when coverage isn’t consistent with the frequency of crime. The reasoning behind this is that the news coverage doesn’t exemplify the severity of sexual violence in society, and therefore readers don’t understand how common and impactful it truly is.

Not only does the type of crime determine what is considered “newsworthy,” but so does the type of victim. “Women who are raped or battered or even murdered appear to be journalistically unimportant unless they are white and middle class or if they can serve as a warning to other women” (Meyer, 1997). This relates to an idea called the Ideal Victim. There are six characteristics one must possess to be labeled as an ideal victim in any criminal situation. He or she must be 1) weak, 2) blameless, 3) currently carrying out a noble task, 4) was harmed by forces or people of evil nature, 5) the people or forces aren’t able to be identified, 6) the victim can effectively claim victim status (Christie, 1986). When it comes to being an ideal victim of sexual violence, we see the characteristics are even more specific and harder to meet.

The ideal victim of sexual violence of any kind is 1) young, 2) white, 3) female, 4) upper middle-class, 5) attacked by a stranger, 6) doesn't struggle with addiction, poverty, or any mental illness, 7) of sober mind at the time of the crime, 8) a virgin, 9) wears modest clothes, and 10) has no criminal record. This image allows society to question the history and decision making of any victim that doesn't fit this mold (Rodriguez, 2021).

Misrepresentation of sexual violence not only hurts the male and female readers' understanding of sexual violence at large, but it also damages how women view their safety and how they should behave in order to avoid these more extreme situations that truly aren't as common as women believe (Carter, 1998 et al). These more extreme forms of sexual violence that are more commonly reported on include serial rape, multiple perpetrator/gang rape, stranger rape, and blitz sexual assault. The reality is that the most common forms of sexual violence is acquaintance rape and makes up over 80% of all reported rapes (Marshall University, 2022). The stories of sexual violence we report on create an environment of fear and disruption (Aroustamian, 2019). All cases of sexual violence are serious and relevant, and journalists are putting one specific and extreme type of situation on a pedestal for the world to see at the expense of de-legitimizing other common and relevant types of sexual violence (Carter, 1998). The crimes that occur at a higher frequency are seen as familiar and mundane according to a study done by David Pritchard and Karen D. Hughes (1997). But when a crime as severe as forms of sexual violence happens so frequently that it is seen as mundane, that is a serious issue. What makes the crime so devastating is the toll it has on the victim, the aftermath of the crime, as with other severe crimes. Choosing to not report on sexual violence because it has become too familiar and predictable creates the risk of keeping individuals in the dark about the ways they are unknowingly experiencing sexual violence themselves. It is journalists' job to inform and

educate the public to the best of their ability, but one study found that 60% of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence did not originally label it as such. This isn't including men who have unknowingly experienced sexual violence.

The way journalists write about sexual violence cases has lasting effects not only on readers but on victims. Sexual violence has the ability to leave short- and long-term effects on survivors—things like anxiety, depression, shame, and shock, as well as medical costs and legal expenses. There is a lack of consistency in the language American journalists use and the meaning of words that are regularly implemented in cases of sexual violence (Aroustamian, 2019). The language chosen by journalists is being consumed by a very easily influenced public.

Framing Theory

Framing deals with the content of media coverage and how different ways of reporting the same issue can result in different responses rather than just the effects of media coverage (Chong & Druckman). Media tend to draw the public eye to specific topics that they report on. Then the attention is taken a step further to create a frame through which the audience will comprehend the story, to give the story more meaning. These frames can be found within key words, metaphors, concepts, symbolism, and even images (Arowolo, 2017). When it comes to sexual violence in the media, framing theory influences the audience's understanding and beliefs of the situation and the way a reader responds.

Audience understanding is affected by ways of framing by media. One way is through the inclusion and exclusion of information (Chong & Druckman). Journalists have the power to decide what information should and should not be shared with the public. Because of this, readers understanding of the material being presented is mostly up to journalists. For example, if

a journalist excludes the fact that a perpetrator has two additional rape allegations against him in an article about him allegedly raping a woman, that will drastically change the readers understanding of the situation. It is important that the information selected to be included in journalistic articles are relevant to the case and are not going to give the readers an excuse to blame the victim. Another way that framing by the media impacts audience understanding is through what is more prominently presented in the media. This is used with political candidates or issues a lot, but it is also used in crime reporting (Arowolo, 2017). As discussed earlier, not only are certain types of crimes prioritized, but so are certain types of victims (Meyers, 1997). The constant exposure of young white women being raped by a stranger frames the audience's understanding of sexual violence. This shapes their belief of who can be a victim of sexual violence and who can be a perpetrator.

Part of framing theory is the language journalists choose to use in their writing and the image they create of the people involved. Language has a significant impact on reader response (Chermak, 1995; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002). Throughout tons of sexual violence stories in the media there is use of suggestive language (Aroustamian, 2019). These simple and overused words shape victims into liars. The media tend to excessively use words like “allegedly” or “claimed.” At first glance, these words are simply commonly used language in criminal news coverage. What needs to be taken into consideration is that these two words specifically imply a sense a disbelief of survivors from the reporter's perspective. The same goes for words like “accusers” instead of survivor. This gives the implication that the survivor is doing something wrong to the perpetrator. Lastly, the terms “engaging in” and “sex scandal” are used far too often when reporting on sexual violence (Aroustamian, 2019). These phrases take the crime and lessen it down to a casual issue (Chong & Druckman). Some researchers have even gone as far to

say that this language sensationalizes it and turns it into the latest drama that readers should be keeping up with (Arowolo et al.). When journalists imply blame in any way, whether they intend to or not, this has a significant impact on the way readers respond to situations and the beliefs they develop about the situation and the people involved. There was a study done by Palazzolo and Roberto that said message content has the ability to elicit emotions in a predictable way. This means that journalists generally have the ability to choose how they want their readers to respond and react to certain news by strategically selecting what information they want to be shared. This study relates directly to the inclusion and exclusion of information. Results of this study found that when participants knew more about the perpetrators background—where they are from, what they do for a living, if they have children, where they attended school, any humanistic information—they more often expressed sympathy towards the perpetrator. On the other hand, participants who were exposed to information designed to increase perpetrator responsibility were more likely to blame the perpetrator and hope for punishment. The same can be assumed for readers opinions of victims and survivors. When journalists frame the victim by including unnecessary information like their clothing choice, where they were when they were attacked, if they had been drinking, if they fought for their life or not, this plays a serious role in the overall image of victims (Rodriguez, 2021).

It is important to note that framing can be used to rally people together around issues like racism, xenophobia, ideological extremism, and other values. Journalists desire, to an extent, the solidification of the public's opinion to create unity amongst communities Framing is always present in journalistic writing; however it can be expected that as active engagement and interest of the public increases, the effects of framing by the media decreases (Chong & Druckman).

Determining Political Affiliation of Publications

When looking at various publications across the United States, some have a more obvious political leaning than others. There are many resources that have taken the liberty of identifying some more well-known publications political affiliation. For example, some right leaning publications include *The Public Interest*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Des Moines Register*, and *The Las Vegas Review Journal*. Some of the left leaning publications include *The Los Angeles Times*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *The Denver Post*, and *The Baltimore Sun* (Altschiller, 2016). The political leaning of the above candidates was primarily based on of the 2020 general election endorsements. When the publication chose not to endorse a candidate, the political affiliation was then based on the analysis of news stories from that publication and the political leanings reflected from them conducted by Boston University.

Another tool for determining political bias of media sources is through All Sides. All Sides bases its findings on an editorial review of a news outlets homepage, headlines, recent articles, photos, and other content from the previous six months. It conducts Blind Bias Surveys to determine the political affiliation of publications (All Sides, 2022). All Sides factors in survey participants own political bias when calculating the survey results. Survey participants are asked to identify what they feel is the political leaning of certain publications and headlines. The average political rating from the survey participants is deemed the publications political standing in the results. All Sides also uses independent research, third-party data, and community feedback in determining the political affiliation of publications. This website is used and trusted by universities like the University of Michigan and can be found on its library website.

For the publications that are not entirely clear on their political leanings, there are some criteria that can aid in determining the political stance of publications. Boston University has

studied the placement of events in print media, editorial columns published, and what stories they choose to report on of different major publications around the United States. Based on this information, Donald Altschiller was able to solidify a list of publications and where they stand politically. If political affiliation is still unclear, I also can look into who is sponsoring the publication. Are they looking to share information or to influence social or political change? If they are seeking to influence change, is that change more in line with a Republican or Democratic viewpoint (City Colleges of Chicago, 2011).

One final piece of advice when determining political leaning of United States publications comes from L. Brent Bozell III. He said “If the paper never met a conservative cause it didn’t like, it’s conservative. If the paper never met a liberal cause it didn’t like, it’s liberal.” This seems obvious but is a good reminder of how simple it can potentially be to determine the political leaning of a publication.

Existing Studies and Resources on Covering Sexual Violence in the Media

There are a number of studies and resources that can be examined to help journalists better cover stories of sexual violence in a more respectful and positively impactful way. Currently, newspapers often use euphemisms to describe sexual violence in their writing. First, why do journalists approach sources for sensitive stories? By using direct sources, journalists make the story into an account of human experience (Healey, 2020). Instead of it being information all relayed from police reports, we humanize the victim involved. Approaching sources allows journalists to get more information and more accurate answers because they are able to verify the facts they have been given. This is so important because even the smallest mistake or misinformation in these kinds of stories can cause major distress (Layman, 2020). By

approaching sources, journalists are giving control to the families and victims involved. They are allowed to decide what they want included in the story. A lot of times, victims feel like they have very little control of the situation once they have reported the crime. By giving them the final say in what goes into the story, they are given back some of the control they feel they lost and gives them a sense of comfort (Healey, 2020).

When approaching, journalists should always come prepared and make sure they know the basic information and facts about the case they are covering. They should approach people gently and compassionately and keep an open mind about the people they talk to; people tend to respond differently than they normally would when they have experienced a traumatic event. Make sure to acknowledge and apologize for what they are having to go through (Healey, 2020).

Trauma reporter Lucy Williamson provides insight to journalists through her first-hand experience. The first thing she says is that it is crucial that journalists understand that people should always be prioritized over stories. That is their physical, mental, and emotional well-being should not be put at risk for the sake of publishing this story. Journalists should trust their instincts as a human being. Journalists should know what feels right and wrong and trust that they are making the ethical and humane decision. One way to help make this process easier for both journalist and victim is to take the time to connect with them on a personal level before diving into any interviews. This makes the interviewee feel more comfortable talking about their situation. Another way to make subjects more comfortable is to select an interview location that they are familiar with and that has some privacy. Give them space when they are sharing. Don't pry too much, often times the information that is most valuable will naturally come up if you allow them to tell you their story in their own time. Lastly, avoid over-promising to the subject in terms of the impact you will have and the involvement you will have in their life (Healey, 2020).

When writing the physical story, mind your language. Journalists should never oversimplify the situation or make any assumptions about survivors or perpetrators. It should always be verified if the subject would like to be referred to as a victim or a survivor before writing their story, and it should also be verified if they would like their name to be used or excluded from the story. Lastly, if it is possible, try to include a helpline in the piece somewhere and consider including a trigger warning at the beginning of the writing as a courtesy to other survivors (Healey, 2020).

METHOD

The study will use interviews from a neo-positivist perspective to reveal information about the ways publications of varying political affiliations report on sexual violence. A neo-positivist perspective seeks to find participants beliefs, perspectives, opinions, and attitudes concerning sexual violence media coverage (Roulston, 2010). Interviewing current professional journalists will provide the study with up to date and relevant information to analyze and interpret. The interviews being conducted will be semi-structured; every interviewee will be asked the same set of predetermined questions. Using a structured interview will keep my own personal bias to a minimum when interviewing journalists with a different political affiliation than myself.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Journalists from various publications will be interviewed with the same set of questions. These interviews will uncover the process they go through when reporting on sexual violence, any editor guidelines they have, what they avoid and what they include, and the language they

use when talking about victims and offenders. All interviewees will work for American publications as the study is focused on national news coverage.

There will be 14 journalists selected for structured interviewing: Seven from a seemingly liberal publication and seven from a seemingly conservative publication. Each journalist selected is required to have an education level greater than or equal to a bachelor's degree. Both men and women journalists assigned to a criminal/police beat will be interviewed, and every interviewee will be asked the same list of questions. Journalists from liberal or conservative identified publications will be selected based on availability.

Throughout the study there are a few challenges that are expected. Journalists that are being selected for interviews may be closed off about the subject and the ways that they choose to cover sexual violence in the media. This will make it challenging to gather information on the subject and may result in looking for different subjects to interview. There will be back-up interviewees selected at the beginning of the study in case this issue arises.

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews will take place in person when geographic restrictions allow for it. If it isn't feasible to meet and conduct the interview in person, the interview will be conducted via Zoom. Interviews (both in person and on Zoom) will be recorded and then transcribed using a transcription software called otter.ai or a purchased subscription if needed. Interviewees will be identified as long as they grant permission. Identifying interviewees is preferred for the study to increase validity and credibility. If interviewees wish to remain anonymous, they will be given a false name to represent them throughout the study.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your name with spelling, age, and level of education?
2. What news organization do you work for?
3. How often would you say sexual violence is covered by your publication?
4. What factors determine if a sexual violence case is newsworthy?
5. Do you have any editor guidelines for a sexual violence story?
6. What language is typically used in these stories?
 - a. Is there specific language you avoid?
 - b. Is there specific language you always use?
7. How involved is the victim in the release of the story?
 - a. Are you ever in contact with them?
 - b. Are they informed of the release?
8. What is typically the intended message of the story?
9. What information is typically included in these stories?
 - a. Name of victim/offender?
 - b. Age of victim/offender?
 - c. Sexual orientation of victim/offender?
 - d. Race of victim/offender?
 - e. Situation?
 - f. Location?
 - g. Date/time?
10. Where does the information for the story come from?
11. What would you change about the way these stories are covered?

12. Do you feel the current method of coverage is hurtful or helpful for victims and the public?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

DATA ANALYSIS

Once interviews have been transcribed, they will be analyzed and read over by the researcher. Researchers will summarize their findings after reading over the interview. Once a summary is written, researchers will begin looking for certain language and words throughout the interview. Words such as victim, survivor, perpetrator, accused, etc. to compare language with other interviews done in the process. Information will be organized based on political party and which language is used more often in liberal media, conservative media, or both assuming there is a significant difference.

POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

St Louis Post-Dispatch (Liberal)

Katie Kull, Public Safety Reporter, 314-340-8087

Erin Heffernan, Public Safety Reporter, 314-340-8145

Taylor Tiamoyo Harris, Night Crime Reporter, 314-340-8319

The Denver Post (Liberal)

Shelly Bradbury, Courts and Breaking News Reporter, ext. 1785, email: sbradbury,

Twitter: ShellyBradbury

Elise Schmelzer, Law Enforcement/Safety Reporter, ext. 1368, email: eschmelzer,

Twitter: eliseschmelzer

The Boston Globe (Liberal)

Tonya Alanez, Federal Courts, State Courts, and Legal Affairs Reporter,

tonya.alanez@globe.com

Evan Allen, Police, Breaking News, Major Events Reporter, evan.allen@globe.com

Travis Anderson, Crime and Breaking News Reporter, travis.andersen@globe.com

The Sacramento Bee (Liberal)

Rosalio Ahumada, Courts Reporter/Breaking News Reporter

Shaun Holkko, Crime and Justice and Sports Reporter

Jason Pohl, Crime and Justice Reporter

Los Angeles Times (Liberal)

Libor Jany, Law Enforcement and Justice Issues Reporter, libor.jany@latimes.com

Alene Tchekmedyian, LA County Sheriff's Department Reporter,

alene.tchekmedyian@latimes.com

Kevin Rector, LA Police Department Reporter, kevin.rector@latimes.com

The Baltimore Sun (Liberal)

Jessica Anderson, Criminal Justice Reporter, jkanderson@baltsun.com,

410-332-6625

McKenna Oxenden, Breaking News Reporter, moxenden@baltsun.com,

410-332-8674

Lee Sanderlin, Criminal Justice Reporter, lsanderlin@baltsun.com,

410-332-6100

The Washington Post (Liberal)

Karla Adam, Crime and Justice Reporter, karla.adam@washpost.com

Keith L. Alexander, Crime and Justice Reporter

The New York Post (Conservative)

Olivia Bensimon, Crime and Justice Reporter

Larry Celona, Crime and Justice Reporter

Washington Times (Conservative)

Ryan Lovelace, Business/Finance, Crime and Justice Reporter, LovelaceRD@gmail.com

Tom Loverro, Crime and Justice Reporter

Alex Swoyer, Crime and Justice Reporter, aswoyer@washingtontimes.com

Savannah Morning News (Conservative)

Drew Favakeh, Public Safety Reporter, AFavakeh@Gannett.com

Des Moines Register (Conservative)

Eric Ferkenhoff, Midwest Criminal Justice Reporter, eferkenhoff@gannett.com

Philip Joens, Breaking News Reporter, pjoens@registermedia.com

Las Vegas Review Journal (Conservative)

Jonah Dylan, Breaking News Reporter, jdylan@reviewjournal.com

Glenn Puit, Crime Reporter, gput@reviewjournal.com

Ricardo Torres-Cortez, Breaking News and Public Safety Reporter,
rtorres@reviewjournal.com

Sabrina Schnur, Crime Reporter, sschnur@reviewjournal.com

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