

Pitt Meadows Gang Rape: A Media Analysis

by

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Abstract

In September of 2010, a 16-year-old girl was raped by several men at a rave in Pitt Meadows, Vancouver. Pictures and video of the assault were posted on the social networking site Facebook. The violent nature of the crime, and the use of Facebook as a means to disseminate information about the rape, caused the case to receive both local and national media attention. This thesis will explore print coverage and discussion of the Pitt Meadows gang rape in newspapers the month following the rape. Using critical discourse analysis, this thesis will explore the prevalence of rape myths in news reporting and the absence of a discussion of rape culture. In this case, technology was posited as the true villain, and a discussion of proper Internet usage replaced a conversation about rape culture.

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Chapter One: Introduction

September 10th, 2010, a 16-year-old girl attending a rave in Vancouver's Pitt Meadows was taken to a nearby field and raped by five to seven men.¹ Videos and images were taken of the rape by witnesses and were later posted and shared online on the social networking site Facebook. Police learned of the sexual assaults from students at the victim's school who saw the photos and reported the crime to police a week later. Two arrests were made in January of 2011, one 18-year-old man was charged with sexual assault and one 19-year-old man was charged with distributing child pornography.² While police asserted that the victim could not consent because she was drugged and under the influence of alcohol, the victim's culpability became a matter of debate online between groups of her peers.³ The debate between some of the victim's peers who believed the sex was consensual and others, who were horrified by the vicious crime, played out in the print media and resulted in opposing Facebook groups in support and in doubt of the victim.⁴ The victim released a statement thanking her supporters but has since left school due to bullying and personal attacks following the rapes. The print coverage of this rape is an important example of how Canadian media handle issues of sexual violence and is therefore the topic of study in this thesis.

This thesis provides an analysis of print coverage of the Pitt Meadows rapes, and explores whether the coverage utilized rape myths and placed emphasis on the victim's actions instead of her attackers. It also studies the use of social networking sites

¹ "Gang Rape," *CTV News* online. 16 September 2010

² Jennifer Saltman, "Victim bullied, forced to leave school after alleged rape at Pitt Meadows rave." *Postmedia News*. 6 January 2011.

³ Douglas Quan, "Victim's peers dispute alleged rave-party rape- One says shame of online posting prompted girl to make charges." *Winnipeg Free Press*. 18 September 2010.

⁴ Damian Inwood, "Facebook support swells for girl in gang-rape claim." *The Province*. 19 September 2010.

for sourcing in print coverage and asks whether rape myths are reproduced in the process. In addition, this thesis explores possibilities for alternative discourses when it comes to rape coverage and what improvements can be made in order to avoid rape myths in portraying rape and rape victims. This thesis is informed by literature and theories addressing rape culture and rape myths by Helen Benedict, Marian Meyers and others, which will be discussed further in this and the following chapters. It explores both local and national print media coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape employing discourse analysis of news coverage as informed by the work of Norman Fairclough and Teun Van Dijk. As Teun Van Dijk has written, language has been used to “legitimate control, or otherwise 'naturalize' the social order, and especially relations of inequality.”⁵ An exploration of the discourse surrounding the rape, language from police, and the victim’s peers, helped to answer questions as to whether rape myths occurred in the coverage of Pitt Meadows, and if so, how and where they occurred. Five central research questions helped to guide the study:

1. Did victim blame occur in print coverage of and postings about the Pitt Meadows gang rape case?
2. What rape myths were utilized, if any, in the print coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape? How were the victim and perpetrators situated?
3. How did print news coverage and social network postings portray the debate between the victim’s peers and police?
4. What role did technology, and Facebook more specifically, play in print coverage of the gang rape; how were they portrayed by media, police, and the community?

⁵ Teun Van Dijk, News as Discourse. (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1988), 254.

5. Were there alternative discourses, i.e., a discussion of rape culture, present in print media of the rape? If so, were they given prominence in coverage?

In order to address the questions above, this thesis provides an analysis of 43 Canadian print articles published between the dates of September 10, 2010 (the weekend the rapes took place), and October 10, 2010. This study was delimited to a one-month period in order to collect media coverage of the rape while it was still considered a top news story, and yet still have a time frame long enough to allow for the possibility of news narratives to shift in the weeks following the assault. The delimited period was also chosen for practical reasons so a manageable number of articles could be obtained for the purpose of this study. At the beginning of the news cycle the majority of the stories were of the “hard news” variety and appeared in the front section of the newspapers. As the month went on, there were more editorial and opinion pieces that focused on exploring why and how this rape and the subsequent Facebook postings occurred. At the end of the month time period there were fewer articles on the rape as it was no longer a top news story, and the articles shifted back to a “hard news” format with much shorter articles that focused on the ongoing developments in the case. Newspapers and online media analyzed in this thesis were: the *Vancouver Sun*, *The Province*, the *Globe and Mail*, *The Canadian Press*, the *National Post*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, *CTV News*, *CBC News*, *Postmedia News*, and the *Toronto Star* as well as postings on the social networking site Facebook. With both *CTV News* and *CBC News*, only their online print content was used.

This thesis examined the discourse constituting the articles in order to explore whether language, quotations, and the sources used evoked certain rape myths or

elements of rape culture. The major findings were: the employment of rape myths like victim blame; emphasis on the personal responsibility of the victim rather than her attackers; discourses of technological determination that distracted from discussing the rapes as situated within rape culture; the sourcing of social network postings by print news media, which overemphasized a discourse of victim blame so that it appeared to be equal with more predominant views; and while alternative discourses like discussion of rape culture did appear to emerge from coverage, there was minimal effort made to provide alternative narratives of victimhood in the coverage studied.

I found that despite attempts by police to depict the girl as a victim of rape, victim blaming narratives and rape myths were utilized in Pitt Meadows mainstream media coverage. This was likely not done through a malicious attempt by print media to frame the victim as culpable, but through the re-reporting of victim blame statements made by the girl's peers. While alternative discourses did appear to emerge from coverage, there was minimal effort to provide alternative narratives of victimhood in print news coverage. A reliance on quotes from police and the victim's peers meant that rape myths were perpetuated through a parroting of sources, and that a discussion that contextualized the rape within a broader framework of rape culture was minimally present in reportage, which will be discussed further in the Analysis chapter.

The role of social media in crime reporting, especially in the case of the Pitt Meadows gang rape, cannot be ignored. The rape was posted, and first discovered by police, on Facebook. The photos and video of the crime were posted and reposted by the victim's peers. Facebook also became a forum on which the victim was both supported

and vilified by her peers, leading to the creation of two separate Facebook groups.⁶ Social media was central to the discovery of the crime online, and the role of technology in the reporting of the rape, and the proliferation of the rape images became one of the focal points of media coverage. Therefore, this thesis will address the role social networking sites played in the coverage of this crime, and how discourses surrounding technology subsumed a discussion of rape and rape culture.

The remainder of the Introduction chapter will outline major themes in coverage and the theories that will be informing the Pitt Meadows case study. The Literature Review/Methodology chapter will further explicate important theories and concepts to contextualize the Pitt Meadows analysis and discussion. The Discourses of Rape chapter will explore the history and literature of rape law and its impact in North America. The Analysis/Discussion chapter will delve into the major findings of this thesis. Lastly, the Conclusion chapter will include a summation of major themes explored in the analysis as well as suggestions for further research.

Discourse Analysis

A discourse analysis as described by Teun Van Dijk, “plays close attention to language and its usage, exploring the discursive structures and rhetorical strategies of what is broadly termed the text- this could be a newspaper, a poem, a television show...any social artifact imbued with meaning.”⁷ The “text” for this thesis will be the Canadian newspaper coverage the case received. Along with Van Dijk, the analysis was informed by the theories of Norman Fairclough. Fairclough’s work in the theory of critical discourse analysis offers a clear road map for examining media texts. As

⁶ Inwood, “Facebook support.”

⁷ Teun Van Dijk, News as Discourse, 20.

Fairclough writes, critical discourse analysis involves “a three-dimensional framework, where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis into one another: analysis of spoken or written texts, analysis of discourse practice (distribution of texts), and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice.”⁸ Fairclough also writes that discourse analysis is important in unveiling the “achievement of hegemonic power through discourse,”⁹ that is, the ways in which the print media assert the status quo through the language they use. This thesis will analyze the language of print media in Pitt Meadows coverage in order to examine the types of processes and discourses the coverage engages in.

Rape Culture and Rape Myths

One of the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis is the theory of rape culture and rape myths explored in Helen Benedict’s Virgin or Vamp and Marian Meyer’s News Coverage of Violence. As defined by Ayres Boswell and Joan Spade, rape culture is “a set of values and beliefs that provide an environment that is conducive to rape. The term applies to a generic culture surrounding and promoting rape, not the specific settings in which rape is likely to occur.”¹⁰ Within rape culture there are a number of rape myths that can emerge in print reporting. These myths can serve to fortify and perpetuate a rape culture by blaming the victim for her rape, while ignoring sexual violence against women as a deeply rooted social problem.

In Virgin or Vamp, Helen Benedict writes that rape myths are used by society and the press in order to explain away the problem of rape, and help to ignore the structural,

⁸ Norman Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1995), 50.

⁹ Fairclough, Critical Discourse, 52.

¹⁰ Ayres Boswell and Joan Spade, “Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture: Why Are Some Fraternities More Dangerous Places For Women?” Gender and Society 10.2 (April 1996), 133.

institutional and cultural roots of sexual violence. Rape myths like the belief that rape is sex, in which the victim 'asks for it' by means of her conduct and dress, and that rapists are lunatics who exist outside of the framework of regular society,¹¹ Benedict explains, are some of the more common myths that are used to explicate and explain away the root causes of sexual violence. She writes, "looking at rape myths is a way of examining public attitudes towards women, sex and violence and the role the press plays in establishing and reinforcing those attitudes."¹² By using rape myths in sexual assault reporting, journalists can be unwittingly reproducing a rape culture.

Though this coverage and perpetuation of rape myths is most likely not made with the malicious intention to blame rape victims, by doing so journalists and print coverage can act as a social control on female behaviour. Media coverage of crime perpetuates and reinforces society's normative values and thus marginalizes those who act outside its prescribed norms. As Marian Meyers explains, "news values constitute a framework that supports the dominant ideology while marginalizing, trivializing, and constructing as devious and dangerous any that challenge it."¹³

A common rape myth espoused in popular culture is that men's insatiable need for sex will drive them to rape, therefore women must know this and protect themselves. In this 'man driven crazy by lust myth, the man is helpless to deny his animal urges, and the onus is on the woman to be powerful enough to stave off his advances. The active nature of male sexuality and dominance, juxtaposed against the passivity of female sexuality, is a myth that is perpetuated and reinforced by pop culture narratives, says

¹¹ Helen Benedict, Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

¹² Ibid.

Marian Meyers, News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 34.

theorist Jane Caputi. She writes, “any examination of popular culture reveals an enormous range of explicit imagery that constructs feminine and masculine subjectivities based in gender inequality, conditioning us to eroticize domination, subordination, violence, and objectification.”¹⁴

In contrast to the ‘man driven crazy by lust’ myth, is the myth that rapists are monsters that act outside of society’s sociological framework. As Benedict writes,

There is the dominant image of a rapist as perverted, ugly, seedy or insane, which directly contradicts the preceding hot-blooded-male myth. It is held in reserve for those times when the sex crime is extremely grotesque or when the victim cannot easily be pegged as someone who has provoked it.¹⁵

This myth can be used by media coverage when a woman is not seen as provoking her rape. Therefore, if she has not dressed and/or acted inappropriately, her innate sexuality was all that was needed to entice the helpless male. The myth that men who rape are monsters, outsiders, and societal outcasts can serve to ignore and obscure the deep root causes of sexual violence against women and can redirect blame to one bad apple, rather than address sexism and misogynistic beliefs held in Western culture.

News Culture and the Discourses of Power

The news media do not have the sole influence on the shaping and shifting of societal values. However, the news media do have privileged access to mass communication platforms. When news media reproduce rape myths in reporting, they have a hand in reinforcing hegemonic norms of proper female behaviour. As Ericson, Baranek and Chan write in their book Visualizing Deviance, the news media have power in their ability to define and shape what we see as deviance. By defining deviance, news

¹⁴ Jane Caputi, “The Pornography of Everyday Life.” Mediated Women: Representations in Popular Culture. Ed. Marian Meyers. (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1999), 55.

¹⁵ Benedict, Virgin or Vamp, 17.

media contribute to designating who and what is bad, and who and what is good. They write, “In terms of their ability to choose what to convey, and the huge audiences to whom they convey it, journalists possibly have more influence in designating deviance and in contributing to control than do some of the more obvious agents of control.”¹⁶ Therefore, the way the media and journalists choose to cover rape can have influence on how that crime and the people involved are perceived. Journalists act not only as policing agents on the behaviour of perceived wrong-doers, but also on the behaviour of their victims as well. Also problematic is that this deviance-defining power can be perceived as neutral. As Ericson, Baranek and Chan write, “the media have an affinity for claiming that their policing is for the public interest. The basis of this claim is the appearance of neutrality... In their discourse of threats, dangers, and precursors of change, journalists shape our sense about order and progress.”¹⁷ While the usage of rape myths in news coverage has been well documented by Helen Benedict and Marian Meyers and others, some scholars have studied the ways in which feminist principles have made inroads into newsroom culture. They argue the insertion of alternative discourses and feminist values have helped diversify and introduce counterframes into news coverage.¹⁸

¹⁶ Patricia Baranek, Janet Chan and Richard Ericson, Visualizing Deviance: A Study of News Organization. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ Carolyn Byerly, “Beyond the Question of Naming: Ethical dimensions of Sex-crime Reporting: An Essay Review by Carolyn M. Byerly.” Journal of Mass Media Ethics. 11. 1 (1996), 56.

Alternative Discourses in Rape Coverage

Recent research suggests that rape coverage has become more discursively complex in recent years, due to the insertion of feminist values into the newsroom, and shifting cultural attitudes towards rape. As societal values change, so do the ways in which rape myths emerge in news coverage. As scholar Carolyn Byerly writes,

There are significant intellectual developments that portend the evolution of a new ethical framework for the reporting of rape by the news media... feminist analysis of rape and battery have introduced new terminology, reformed laws and legal processes, and produced a burgeoning literature, these show up in the news stories today in a variety of ways.¹⁹

As journalists become more informed on the literature and research around victim blaming and rape myths, they are better able to understand and cover rape, Byerly argues, though she notes that rape coverage is still far from perfect. Byerly also mentions that feminist activism surrounding rape and violence against women has created a historical narrative and context for rape crimes in general. This has given journalists historical, political, and social context for these crimes, which has worked towards creating a new narrative for rape victims and their attackers.²⁰ This does not mean that rape myths no longer appear in print coverage of sexual violence. However, current media reports on rape must be viewed through a lens that has been informed by these societal shifts and changed values. As this thesis suggests, Canadian print news reports on Pitt Meadows did not fully reflect newer understandings of rape as informed by feminist perspectives.

Overview of Analytical Findings

Despite insistence from police that the Pitt Meadows victim could not have engaged in consensual sex, some of her peers questioned the validity of her rape claims in

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

the press. It was reported at the time that she was given the date rape drug (which later proved false)²¹ and police stated that there was no way the victim could have consented to any sexual activity, and she was far outnumbered by her attackers and witnesses. Her fellow students were quoted speaking out in support of the attackers, stating that they believed the rapes to be consensual, as the victim appeared to be awake in photos. A preliminary analysis of the news coverage reveals some of the students evoked the 'she asked for it' myth as discussed by Benedict and Meyers. The victim was found to be responsible for her rape, because of her behaviour and conduct the night she was attacked.

The students' reactions to the crime stunned many of the police officers working the case, causing one Pitt Meadows police officer Sergeant Jennifer Hyland to call the rapes, "one of the most disgusting and disturbing crimes I've ever investigated."²² The commonality and usage of the terms such as "disgusting," "monster," and "animals," seemed to indicate that the rape was aberrant. These findings indicate that both the victim's father and police situated the attackers as a group of sick people acting out in a crazed rampage, rather than situating their behaviour and actions within the broader framework of rape culture. And lastly, another theme that emerged was technology as morally corrupting, meaning partial blame for the attack was placed on technology and its ability to desensitize youths to violence and crime.²³ Despite some of this disturbing coverage, there was one article that placed the gang rape within the broader context of rape culture and offered counterframes to the traditional paradigm of rape coverage.

²¹ Saltman, "Victim Bullied."

²² Glenda Luymes, "Gang-rape photos posted on Net; 'Disgusting, morally corrupt...so socially corrupt it is sickening.'" *The Province*. 17 September 2010.

²³ Douglas Todd, "Internet gang rape photos open up a Pandora's Box of 'social media' evil." *Vancouver Sun*. 18 September 2010.

Victim Blame in Pitt Meadows

Despite the vicious nature of the crime, there were still members of the victim's community that believed she should bear the blame for her attack. One female student who was interviewed and described as a friend of the victim said, "It makes me angry, she's ruining these other people's lives."²⁴ Another female student was also quoted as saying, "It's frustrating to us. Police are just listening to what she's saying."²⁵ The student's frustration and outrage that police would exclusively be listening to the rape victim indicates that the rapes were construed as sex by some of the sources quoted. Although there were photos and videos suggesting the victim had been assaulted, this was not enough to convince some of the girl's peers that the assaults had actually constituted rape. There was also the sense, from some of the quotations included in the coverage, that the victim was merely crying rape because she was embarrassed that people found out about it. As one male student said, "I think she made it up. Sometimes people do stuff when they're embarrassed. I think she saw the photos and regretted what she did."²⁶

The Crazy Rapist(s)

The language and disgust of the police towards the violence and heinous nature of the crime discursively situates the act outside the boundaries of normal behaviour, which Benedict says can, "obscure the social, cultural and structural elements that cause and facilitate rape within a rape culture."²⁷ The perpetual betrayal of rape as a single horrific act can send the message that rape is aberrant and perpetrated by monsters and psychopaths, and thus as long as you act like a good girl you will be protected from

²⁴ Douglas Quan, "Girls friends dismiss rape allegations at rave party: Police arrest two; 'She's ruining other people's lives.'" *National Post*. 18 September 2010.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Quan, "Victim's peers."

²⁷ Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp*, 17.

rape.²⁸ Lastly, one of the other major themes to emerge from the coverage was about the evils of technology and its corrupting influence on today's youth.

One such article published in the *Vancouver Sun* suggested that, "the depravity exposed when a Metro Vancouver teenager displayed photos on the internet of a Saturday night gang rape has people shocked about the moral decline of today's young people."²⁹ The emphasis on the corrupting influence of the evils of the social media served up an inanimate scapegoat to take the fall for a crime perpetuated by flesh and blood individuals.

Alternative Discourses

Although much of the print news media's coverage of the rape focused on the reactions of the community and the victim blaming after the attacks, there was one article that alluded to the concept of rape culture, and discussed the implications of rape within the context of a rape culture defined by movies, music, and advertisements. In Antonia Zerbisias's article in the *Toronto Star*,³⁰ the Pitt Meadows gang rape is contextualized by rape culture. The ways in which rape is perceived by men and women, and how it is proliferated through various forms of media is provided as a lens through which to view the Pitt Meadows gang rape. What is accomplished by Zerbisias's conceptual framework is that the "rape is aberrant" myth is muted, and placed within a much larger framework of rape culture and the causal factors that may contribute to male sexual violence. Through her interviews with various women's studies and sociology professors, Zerbisias paints a more complex portrait of the crime, eschewing rape myths and easy explanations for much tougher questions.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Todd, "Internet gang rape."

³⁰ Antonia Zerbisias, "Are mass media creating a culture of rape." *Toronto Star*. 26 September 2010.

In the following chapters this thesis will further illuminate and explore the themes found in newspaper coverage of the Pitt Meadows case. However, I will first provide further background on rape myths, and a brief history of the relationship between the law and rape in order to illuminate past scholarship and historical rulings that give cultural context to current ideas surrounding consent and sexual assault. This thesis will also explore the way the print news media covered the Pitt Meadows gang rape and will argue that rape myths were evoked, and that while alternative discourses appeared, they did not directly confront the paradigm of rape culture with the exception of one article in the *Toronto Star*.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Methodology

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature on rape myths and rape culture and provide a theoretical context for the research questions explored in the analysis chapter. Exploring the work of Helen Benedict, Marian Meyers and others, this chapter will look at rape myths that have existed and continue to influence news reports of sexual violence. This chapter will also outline the five research questions that this thesis will address as well as the methodology employed to address them. I will discuss the ways in which I approached the analysis of 43 print news articles found about the Pitt Meadows rape through a *Factiva* data search. A discussion of discourse analysis, the method employed in this thesis, will be outlined at the end of this chapter following an explanation of the literature and theoretical framework underpinning the thesis.

One of the main theoretical underpinnings of this thesis is the concept of rape culture. As defined by Ayres Boswell and Joan Spade rape culture consists of “a set of values and beliefs that provide an environment that is conducive to rape. The term applies to a generic culture surrounding and promoting rape, not the specific settings in which rape is likely to occur.”³¹ Rape culture and rape myths will be the lens through which this thesis views both the media coverage and the community’s reaction to the crime. The dialogue between police, media, the victim’s father, and the victim’s peers will be analyzed to ascertain whether blame statements were used to describe the victim, and whether the victim was held accountable for her rape. This thesis also has an eye to the language used by sources and journalists when describing the crime. Did the language discursively position the rape as aberrant and perpetuated by only a handful of sick individuals? Who was to blame for the crime: the victim, technology, or sick people? The

³¹ Ayres Boswell and Joan Spade, “Fraternities,” 133.

following literature review will provide some context regarding the frames and theoretical framework this thesis will use in order to answer whether victim blaming occurred in Pitt Meadows.

Rape Culture and Rape Myths

One of the main theories that will inform my analysis of the Pitt Meadows gang rapes is the theory of rape culture. Rape culture describes a society,

In which rape and other sexual violence is common, and in which prevalent attitudes, practices, norms and media condone, normalize, excuse, or encourage sexualized violence. Within the paradigm, acts of sexism are commonly employed to validate and rationalize misogynistic practices. Women are perceived merely as sex objects and in this dehumanization process rape and rape victims are marginalized and trivialized.³²

Within rape culture, there are predominant rape myths, which infiltrate our collective psyche, and thus influence how the news media and the public view rape. Though there may be some limitations to the broad scope and range of rape culture as a framework for analysis, (if it is taken to mean pop music, advertisements, and portrayal of female sexuality through a variety of media), the prevalence of rape myths in media coverage can be a useful way to explore attitudes toward rape. Another definition of rape culture comes from a book called Transforming a Rape Culture. The authors write,

Rape culture means a culture where sexual assault is not only prominent and common, but also tacitly sanctioned through widely promoted attitudes about gender, sexuality, and violence. Rape culture is perpetuated by: misogynistic advertising; entertainment, and other forms of media that sexualize violence; victim-blaming reporting of sexual assault; and the propagation of sexual assault myths.³³

Rape culture is also understood by some scholars as being predicated on gender normative sex roles that posit men as the sexual aggressor and women as the passive

³² Caputi, "Pornography," 58.

³³ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth eds, Transforming a Rape Culture: Revised Edition. (Milkweeds, 2004), 142.

recipient and/or gatekeeper to sex. In essence, sexual behaviour, and by extension attitudes to rape, is learned behaviour. This learned behaviour is accumulated through interactions with others, and “judged and performed in specific cultural and historical worlds.”³⁴ Michael Kimmel, a sociologist who has written about men and masculinity, argues that a sexual culture that asserts men as sexual aggressors and ‘risk takers’ contribute to an understanding of women as passive and uncooperative sexual beings. Therein, women are charged with warding off sexual advances from men, and when they don’t, they can be blamed for it. He writes,

To rein in this constructed male appetite, women have been assigned the role of asexual gatekeepers... Women’s sexual agency, women’s sense of entitlement to desire, is drowned out by the incessant humming of male desire. A man’s job is to wear down her resistance... Men suffer from socialized deafness, a hearing impairment that strikes only when women say no.³⁵

Diane Herman has also written about rape culture and how it is predicated on the belief that men are the sexual aggressors, and women are the passive guardians of their sexual activity. She writes, “Our society is a rape culture because it fosters and encourages rape by teaching males and females that it is natural and normal for sexual relations to involve aggressive behaviour on part of the males.”³⁶

A study on rape attitudes in adolescents seems to indicate that attitudes towards rape and victim blame are learned at an early age. As part of a rape crisis centre questionnaire administered to high school students, the study found that “In general...many high school students tend to view sexually coercive situations as justified...the research findings indicate that rape acceptance and victim blame in acquaintance rape are prevalent among

³⁴ John Gagnon, Human Sexualities. (Glenview, Ill: Scott, Foreman, 1997).

³⁵ Michael Kimmel, “Men, Masculinity and Rape Culture.” Transforming a Rape Culture: Revised Edition. Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth eds. (Milkweeds, 2004), 142.

³⁶ Dianne Herman, “The Rape Culture.” Women: A Feminist Perspective. Jo Freeman ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1984), 52.

adolescents.”³⁷ The study also found that “adolescents may be more accepting of rape myths that attribute the causes of rape to the individual perpetrator and victim than to societal practices and to the ideology of male dominance.”³⁸ These findings seem very prescient when compared to the reactions of some of the Pitt Meadows victim’s peers. Clearly, adolescents and youth are already formulating their ideas on rape culture well before they reach university, or before they experience rape firsthand or through friends. Rape culture, in addition to movies, music and media that sexualize violence, is composed of rape myths. Myths such as: women ask to be raped, or women regularly lie about rape, or that rape is perpetuated by sick people operating outside of societal norms.

Helen Benedict and Marian Meyers address these myths as well as the silencing effect they have on discussing the broader issue of a rape culture. In Virgin or Vamp, Benedict says some common rape myths are “the belief that rape is sex, in which the victim ‘asks for it’ by means of her conduct and dress, and that rapists are lunatics who exist outside of the framework of regular society.”³⁹ Benedict also argues that, “looking at rape myths is a way of examining public attitudes towards women, sex and violence and the role the press plays in establishing and reinforcing those attitudes.”⁴⁰ Therefore, examining the use of rape myths in crime reporting can be a useful exercise towards improving rape coverage by examining the instances in which the press reinforces rape myths and the status quo.

Benedict argues that rape myths and the reporters that use them can be seen as mutually reinforcing through the reintroduction of rape myths as a means of social

³⁷ Robin R. Campbell and Gloria Cowen, “Rape Causal Attitudes Among Adolescents.” The Journal of Sex Research, 32.2. (1995), 145.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁹ Helen Benedict, Virgin or Vamp, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

control that reflects deeply rooted public perceptions about female sexuality. She writes, “The press (as a means of agenda setting and framing) both reflects and shapes public opinion. Sometimes, by reporting events and echoing what is said out in the field, it merely reinforces established opinions by mirroring them.”⁴¹ By utilizing rape myths to report sexual assault the press can act as the (perhaps unwitting) mouthpiece of social control on female behaviour.

A recent example of this was a 2011 *New York Times* article on the repeated gang rape of an 11-year-old girl in Cleveland, Texas. An initial *Times* article on the crime appeared to blame the victim for her rape, quoting community members that said the victim, “dressed older than her age, wore makeup and fashions more appropriate to a woman in her 20s, and that she would often hang out with teenage boys at the playground.”⁴² The article contained no quotes from the victim, or the victim’s family. *Times* readers responded with a massive outpouring of support for the victim, judging the article unfairly biased and guilty of blaming an 11-year-old for her rape by a group of men. Shortly after, the *Times* published an apology for the article and admitted the story “lacked balance,” and that the paper was merely mirroring the reactions of the girl’s community, and were not victim-blaming. The *Times*’ standards editor, Philip Corbett, also stated, “I do think in retrospect we could have done more to provide more context to make that clear”.⁴³ This case is only one example in which the press’s ability and power to reinforce damaging rape myths has been put under the microscope. Although it is encouraging that so many people responded to the *Times* article’s perceived bias, it is

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² James C. McKinley Jr., “Vicious Assault Shakes Texas Town.” *New York Times*. 8 March 2011.

⁴³ Arthur Brisbane, “Gang Rape Story Lacked Balance.” *New York Times*. 11 March 2011.

troubling to think that this article was published in the first place without providing a context for the community's commentary.

Unfortunately, similar reporting often goes unchallenged despite the fact that print coverage of crime has the ability to perpetuate and reinforce rape culture values, and can serve to marginalize those that act outside of its prescribed norms. As Marian Meyers explains, "news values constitute a framework that supports the dominant ideology while marginalizing, trivializing, and constructing as devious and dangerous any that challenge it."⁴⁴ Therefore, if crime reporting reinforces and reestablishes the status quo, then "news reports of women as victims of violence act as both a warning to women and a form of social control that outlines the boundaries of acceptable behavior and the forms of retribution they can expect for transgression."⁴⁵

As Benedict writes, the myth that women deserve and 'ask for' rape, "assumes that women bring on rape by behaving carelessly prior to the crime. It was not the rapist that caused the rape it was the woman who failed to prevent herself from enticing him. Benedict argues this myth is put to use every time a police officer asks a victim "what were you doing out so late on your own?"⁴⁶ In the 'she asked for it' myth, the victim is made equally responsible, or more so than her attacker. While the rape was regrettable, it occurred because the victim could not manage to take the necessary precautions to protect herself from the threat of an attack. A recent example of the 'she asked for it' myth in action can be seen in the comments a Toronto police officer made to a group of students at a January 24, 2011 safety forum at York University. The officer stated, "You know I think we're beating around the bush here... I've been told I'm not supposed to say

⁴⁴ Meyers, News Coverage, 34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁶ Benedict, Virgin or Vamp, 16.

this, however, women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized.”⁴⁷ The officer later apologized for his statements, and the Toronto Police stated that officers are taught that nothing a woman does contributes to her rape. Some have nevertheless argued the comment was endemic to a sexist and ill-equipped police department. Jane Doe, a rape victim who won a landmark ruling against the Toronto Police Service in 1998, said the “sluts” comment was not indicative of just one bad apple. “In 2007, I was paid by the Toronto Police Services Board to monitor their sexual assault training for two weeks and the course is riddled with sexist and racist myths and attitudes about rape. I produced an assessment for them and it quickly disappeared.”⁴⁸ In response to the York University incident 3,000 people marched to Toronto Police Headquarters in what was deemed a ‘slut walk,’ to “bring attention to ‘slut-shaming,’ or shaming women for being sexual, and the treatment of sexual assault victims.”⁴⁹ Slut walks have since spread to numerous other cities around the world. The comment by the officer serves as an example of a rape myth that is predicated on the notion women are innately vulnerable to rape, and that it is ultimately a woman’s responsibility to protect herself.

As Meyers writes, notions of personal safety are “intrinsically linked to women’s vulnerability. With rape, there is always the question of complicity. Was she where she shouldn’t have been? Did she fail to take precautions, lock a door, to arrange for security? Did she do something to provoke the attack?”⁵⁰ By focusing on the actions of the victim rather than rape culture itself, this rape myth can be used by the media and their sources at any time to explain an unprovoked attack or heinous crime in order to

⁴⁷ Curtis Rush, “Cop apologizes for ‘slut remarks’ at law school.” *Toronto Star*. 18 February 2011.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Toronto ‘slut walk’ spreads to US.” *CBC News* online. 6 May 2011.

⁵⁰ Meyers, *News Coverage*, 30.

obscure the real roots of sexual violence against women. The ‘she asked for it’ rape myth also falls into the good girl/bad girl dichotomy used in rape coverage in which Meyers argues women “are either innocent, or to blame for their victimization.”⁵¹ Elisabeth Comack and Gillian Balfour also touch on the notion of the erring female who puts herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. Comack and Balfour explain that criminologists and courts have long used the trope of the erring female to cover a multitude of sins. Comack explains,

Women and girls are routinely sanctioned for violating codes of conduct that regulate and patrol the boundaries of ‘appropriate’ female behaviour...this is the trope of the ‘erring female’ that has reproduced and reinforced the dualism between ‘good girls’ (those who are chaste, virtuous, and pious,) and ‘bad girls’ (those who are sexually deviant and wayward...in the process it operates to keep female sexuality in check.⁵²

In this virgin/vamp, good girl/ bad girl binary, women are either helpless innocents who wandered blindly into the lion’s den, or no good sexual transgressors, (prostitutes, sluts, teases, whores), whose sexual power and prowess took them to a dark place. Neither trope allows any agency or power for the victim, and both perpetuate stereotypical notions of cloistered or unbridled female sexual power.

Another dominant rape myth espoused in popular culture is that men are naturally predisposed to rape, and therefore women must protect themselves against the insatiable desires prevalent within male sexuality. In this ‘man driven crazy by lust myth,’ the attacker is helpless against his instincts, and thus it is up to the woman not to entice or arouse his interest. The necessarily active nature of male sexuality and dominance, juxtaposed against the passivity of female sexuality, is a myth that is perpetuated and

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Gillian Balfour and Elisabeth Comack, Criminalizing Women. (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 75.

reinforced by pop culture narratives, says theorist Jane Caputi. She writes, “any examination of popular culture reveals an enormous range of explicit imagery that constructs feminine and masculine subjectivities based in gender inequality, conditioning us to eroticize domination, subordination, violence, and objectification.”⁵³ These cultural images of overtly powerful and unmanageable forms of male sexuality feed into what Benedict calls the rape myth of insatiable male lust. This myth posits that, “the assailant is a hot-blooded male driven beyond self-control by lust,”⁵⁴ whose raw sexuality must not and cannot be regulated. In their study of rape culture in college fraternities Bowell and Spade argue that rape culture and attitudes towards rape are based on social constructions of male and female sexuality. That is, the construction of the passive and reluctantly sexual woman, and the dominant and overtly sexual man. They write, “The abusive attitudes toward women that some fraternities perpetuate exist within a general culture where rape is intertwined in traditional gender scripts. Men are viewed as initiators of sex and women are viewed as either passive partners or active resisters, preventing men from touching their bodies.”⁵⁵ This theory of raw sexual power, and the dangerous and animal-like nature of male and female interactions, has even been fortified by writers like Camille Paglia, who openly mocked the “no means no” movement, stating, “will we ever graduate from Girl Scouts? ‘No’ has always been, and always will be, part of the dangerous, alluring courtship ritual of sex and seduction, observable even in the animal kingdom.”⁵⁶ Paglia’s notion of the animal and primal nature of male sexuality embodies

⁵³ Caputi, “Pornography,” 58.

⁵⁴ Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp*, 15.

⁵⁵ Ayres and Boswell, “Fraternities,” 134.

⁵⁶ Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays*. (New York: Random House, 1992), 8.

and supports the rape myth that perpetuates the notion that men are helpless when faced with female sexuality.

In direct contrast to myth that men are driven crazy by lust is the myth that rapists are monsters, crazy, sick, and aberrant, and thus operate outside society's normative framework. This myth works toward obscuring the social, cultural and structural elements that can cause and facilitate rape. As Benedict writes, "there is the dominant image of a rapist as perverted, ugly, seedy or insane which directly contradicts the preceding hot-blooded-male myth. It is held in reserve for those times when the sex crime is extremely grotesque or when the victim cannot easily be pegged as someone who has provoked it."⁵⁷ The crazed rapist myth was voiced by some of the men in Ayres and Boswell's study of rape culture in fraternities. When asked about the problem of date rape on campus, one man who was surveyed stated, "I have a problem with the word rape. It sound so criminal, and we are not criminals; we are sane people."⁵⁸ Although rape was occurring on campus and at fraternity parties, the men in the study were hesitant to label it as such, because rape, in their minds, was the purview of the insane.

The 'rapist as crazed' myth can be used to explain a rape when the victim hasn't acted outwardly in such a way as to provoke the attack and cannot easily be blamed for it. Critically, by framing the rapist as one bad apple rather than addressing the underlying effects of rape culture, the myth that men who rape are monsters, outsiders and societal outcasts serves to obscure the root causes of sexual violence against women. As Meyers writes, "the common view that men who rape, murder, or otherwise commit acts of violence against women are 'sick' or in some way pathological ignores the social roots of

⁵⁷ Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp*, 17.

⁵⁸ Ayres and Boswell, "Fraternities," 143.

this violence. Our culture denies the fundamental normalcy of violence against women and attempts to paint it as the domain of psychopaths and monsters only.”⁵⁹ In this way the problem of rape is situated outside of normative culture and is labeled as pathological and abnormal. The challenge of dealing with rape therefore becomes a matter of rounding up the sick individuals, instead of addressing perhaps the larger social problem of sexual violence toward women.

Victim Blame in Cases of Gang Rape

In their study of ten major rape cases that were in the media between 1980 and 1996 Joanne Ardovini-Brooker and Susan Caringella-MacDonald provide an analysis on the media’s attribution of blame by determining whether blaming statements were directed towards the victims of rape or their attackers. They looked at stranger rape, acquaintance rape, rape between individuals of different economic classes and race, and also gang rape.⁶⁰ They found that even in instances of gang rape, victims were condemned for their role in the crime, and that victims who were in some way associated with the rapist were much more likely to be blamed for their rape.⁶¹ They write, “In 6 of the 10 cases where victims were blamed to varying degrees, all of the victims were friends, co-workers, fellow students, pickups or newly acquainted parties to their attackers... Victim blaming also corresponded to all three cases that involved drinking in bars.”⁶² The fact that a rape victim may be partially blamed for her rape if she has been drinking or knows the rapists, even when she is outnumbered, speaks to the power of rape myths in popular culture.

News Culture

⁵⁹ Meyers, *News*, 33.

⁶⁰ Joanne Ardovini-Brooker and Susan Caringella-MacDonald, “Media attributions of blame,” 14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 16.

If print coverage has the capacity to both reinforce and reflect public opinion, then the question must be asked, how and why are the news media imbued with such power over societal discourse? As Ericson, Baranek and Chan write in their book Visualizing Deviance, they argue that the media has power in their ability to define and shape what we see as deviance, and in doing so, insert themselves in the process of defining what is morally wrong and right. They write,

In terms of their ability to choose what to convey, and the huge audiences to whom they convey it, journalists possibly have more influence in designating deviance and in contributing to control than do some of the more obvious agents of control. In effect, journalists join with other agents of control as a kind of 'deviance-defining elite,' using the news media to provide an ongoing articulation of the proper bounds to behaviour in all organized spheres of life...In sum, journalists are central agents in the reproduction of order.⁶³

Therefore, the way the media and journalists choose to cover a particular story has great bearing on how that crime and the persons involved are perceived by society. Journalists can act not only as policing agents on the behaviour of perceived wrongdoers, but also on the behaviour of their victims as well. Moreover, this policing role is perceived as a neutral extension of the naturalness of the media in providing a public service and duty to society. But like any institution and profession, there can be no such thing as neutral in journalism. Rather, the media are composed of individuals driven by diverse beliefs and backgrounds, and are themselves governed by news values which dictate what type of stories and sources should be included in news narratives. As Ericson, Baranek and Chan write, "the media has an affinity for claiming that their policing is for the public interest. The basis of this claim is the appearance of neutrality...In their discourse of threats, dangers, and precursors of change, journalists shape our sense about order and

⁶³ Baranek, Chan and Ericson, Visualizing Deviance, 3.

progress.”⁶⁴ Because news reports can appear to be neutral, statements of victim blame or poorly contextualized reports of sexual violence can be ways in which news media perpetuate myths about rape. Though this may be done without malice, news audiences are consequently led to see the victim in a particularly negative light. Critically, the way the media frames certain crimes and stories can affect how the audience interprets the event. Does the media frame the victim as bad or good? Who is to blame for that outcome?

News framing “defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy,”⁶⁵ and “refers to the subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems.”⁶⁶ News framing has also been defined by Linda Trimble as “the necessary technique of processing and packaging information so it can be quickly conveyed by reporters and easily interpreted by the audience,”⁶⁷ and also by Pippa Norris as that which gives ““stories a conventional ‘peg’ to arrange the narrative, to make sense of the facts, to focus the headline, and to define events as newsworthy”⁶⁸ Therefore, the media discussion of details that pertain to the victim’s dress, whereabouts, relationship to the perpetrators, sexual history, and time she reported the incident can affect how the account of the rape is relayed to its audience, or in this case, the girl’s peers at Pitt Meadows. Conversely, the media usage of alternative framing or counterframes which engage a narrative that challenges a hegemonic victim blame frame can work towards a more

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁵ Thomas Nelson et al, “Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance.” American Political Science Review. 91.3. (September 2007), 567.

⁶⁶ Shanto Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 11.

⁶⁷ Shannon Sampert and Linda Trimble, “Who’s in the Game? The Framing of the 2000 Canadian Election by The Globe and Mail and The National Post.” Canadian Journal of Political Science 37.1 (March 2004), 41.

⁶⁸ Introduction: Women, Media and Politics.” Women, Media and Politics. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

nuanced understanding of crimes of sexual violence. Though the proliferation of rape myths in news coverage has been well documented by Benedict and Meyers et al, some scholars have studied the ways in which feminist principles have made inroads into newsroom culture, which they argue has helped to positively reshape the ways in which journalists cover rape.

Alternative Discourses in News Reporting.

If, as Meyers argues, the media can serve to mirror and shape the society in which it exists, the changing attitudes and social mores towards rape and rape victims have most likely led to a more nuanced coverage of rape. As scholar Carolyn Byerly writes,

There are significant intellectual developments that portend the evolution of a new ethical framework for the reporting of rape by the news media... feminist analysis of rape and battery have introduced new terminology, reformed laws and legal processes, and produced a burgeoning literature, these show up in the news stories today in a variety of ways.⁶⁹

While Byerly does note that rape coverage is far from perfect, she argues that the insertion of feminist principles in the newsroom has made for a more holistic approach to the media's coverage of rape. As journalists become more aware of the literature and research around victim-blaming and the existence of dominant (and misleading) rape myths, Byerly argues that the better they will be able to understand and cover rape. Byerly also mentions that feminist activism surrounding rape and violence against women has created a historical narrative and context for rape crimes in general. This has given journalists historical, political, and social context for these crimes, thus contributing to the creation of a new narrative for rape victims and their attackers. As she writes, "the feminist-led activities to stop violence against women have also created the historical context within which such crimes...may now become newsworthy and placed

⁶⁹ Byerly, "Beyond," 56.

on the public's agenda."⁷⁰ Thus what remained invisible, (the patriarchal basis on which rape myths were founded), is now visible, and journalists have more tools with which to better understand and analyze rape. This does not mean, however, that journalists will always do so and that rape myths are no longer perpetuated in newspaper coverage. It does however reflect the undeniable amount of scholarship and activism driven by the feminist movement on behalf of rape victims, and the concurrent responsibility within the media to report on sexual crimes through a prism that is informed by these changing values and societal shifts. A discourse analysis of print media coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape will look for both the influence and evidence of discursive scripts that were at play in the crime's media reports. This thesis will keep an eye to the framing and language used in the reports, and also note whether alternative framing or 'counterframes' emerged from the reportage.

Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to see if rape myths like those outlined above were employed in media coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape by performing a discourse analysis of print news coverage of the event. A search in the *Factiva* database for Canadian newspaper coverage between the dates of September 10, 2010 (the weekend the rape occurred), and October 10, 2010, yielded 43 articles from a variety of local and national newspapers. The five central research questions of this thesis are:

1. Did victim blame occur in print coverage of and postings about the Pitt Meadows gang rape case?
2. What rape myths were utilized, if any, in the print coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape? How were the victim and perpetrators situated?

⁷⁰ Ibid., 57.

3. How did print news coverage and social network postings portray the schism between the victim's peers and police?
4. What role did technology, and Facebook more specifically, play in print coverage of the gang rape; how were they portrayed by media, police, and the community?
5. Were there alternative discourses, i.e., a discussion of rape culture, present in print media of the rape? If so, were they given prominence in coverage?

Along with theories from Van Dijk, the analysis was also informed by the theories espoused by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak. Fairclough writes that critical discourse analysis is “designed for exposing the achievement of hegemonic power through discourse, for demonstrating ideological processes that may not be heeded on the surface,”⁷¹ and an analysis can therefore reveal unnoticed and unexamined structural and institutional practices. An analysis of the coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape can work to unveil ideological processes that may not be occurring at the surface of the text. For example, if media coverage of a rape invokes language of victim blaming it could be because society has been versed in the reified commonsensical notions of female good girl/bad girl behaviour.

The process of using language to shift blame to the victim may not be conscious, but it reflects time-worn clichés and perhaps deeply held societal beliefs about male and female sexuality. As Wodak and Fairclough explain, “discursive practices may have major ideological effects: that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men...”⁷² This manifestation

⁷¹ Ibid., 52.

⁷² Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis.” Discourse as Social Interaction, Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction. Tuen Van Dijk ed. Vol. 2. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 258.

of power and the constitutive effect of discourse on institutions and social practices, and consequently institutions on discourse, is one of the main reasons to use the theory of critical discourse analysis. As Wodak and Fairclough write, “both the ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them are often unclear to people. CDA aims to make more visible these opaque aspects of discourse.”⁷³

Another important term that emerges out of critical discourse work is Wodak’s concept of the discourse-historical method. The discourse-historical method is defined by Wodak as “the attempt to integrate systematically all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of a written or a spoken text.”⁷⁴

The idea that any text does not stand alone, and that it is in fact influenced by other texts that came before it is a crucial element of any critical discourse study. If texts are defined as a continual interplay between past and present, how crimes of sexual violence are covered in the media and portrayed in movies, and popular music, both in the past and the present, influence the discourse surrounding female sexuality and crimes of rape. Discourse surrounding rape and the media’s coverage of rape does not occur in a vacuum. And although there has been definite progress in recent years by the feminist movement and women to change the victim blaming language and sexist police policies of the past, those previous texts still have influence over the present.

Noted by Fairclough as a method of analysis that takes an explicitly activist approach to research, CDA intrinsically incorporates a critical approach to language and the political frameworks of social movements. As Wodak and Fairclough explain, “what

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 266.

is distinctive about CDA is both that it intervenes on the side of the dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups, and that it openly declares the emancipatory interests that motivate it.”⁷⁵ CDA scholars are expected to participate in the great debates of our time, and to contribute meaningfully to breaking down barriers and discourses of class, race, gender, and many other societal ills. Yet as Blommaert and Bulcaen argue in their article “Critical Discourse Analysis,” CDA is not without its critics. CDA’s general theme of advocacy and consistent commitment to participation in social life has come under attack from scholars who state that CDA’s academic integrity is compromised by its activist premise. According to Blommaert, CDA has come under fire for “its blurring of concepts, disciplines and methodologies...its deterministic view of human agency...(and the view that) CDA interprets discourse under the guise of critical analysis.”⁷⁶ CDA’s activist and interdisciplinary nature has led to wariness amongst critics that it may be misused, and that as such certain texts will be reified over others due to their ability to hint towards abuses of institutional and structural power where in fact there are none. While there may be some danger in mixing a wide variety of ideas and concepts from various disciplines, CDA can be an especially effective tool when revealing power in media texts. Given the influence the news media has on defining deviance and control, CDA is especially useful when trying to uncover power relationships in the media’s coverage of crime. As Fairclough writes, “CDA is useful in disclosing the discursive nature of much contemporary social and cultural change. Particularly the language of the mass media is scrutinized as the site of power, of

⁷⁵ Ibid., 259.

⁷⁶ Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, “Critical Discourse Analysis.” *Annual Review Anthropology*. 29. (2000), 455.

struggle, and also as a site where language is apparently transparent.”⁷⁷ This apparently transparent site of language corresponds to Ericson, Baranek, and Chan’s argument that the media has a vested interest in the public believing in its “neutrality” and “transparency.”⁷⁸ An analysis of the coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape can thus work to unveil ideological processes occurring within supposedly neutral crime coverage.

In addition to a discourse analysis this thesis includes a preliminary counting exercise in which articles with blame statements and references to other key rape myths were flagged in order to best gauge the amount of media attention these statements received. The articles were counted and stories were marked as having all or at least one of the following narratives present:

- *Articles that contained rape myths and or victim blaming statements
- *Articles that gave the impression that rape is aberrant or perpetrated by monsters only.
- *Articles that talked about the moral corruptibility of the Internet.
- *Articles that mentioned the victim had been given the date rape drug and that the rape took place at a party house.
- *Articles that had victim supporting statements, or attempted to create alternative discourses of counterframes for the rape.

Any article that contained quotes from the victim’s peers that indicated she was to blame for the rapes, i.e., “I hear two sides of the story, so I’m not sure...She was

⁷⁷ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse*, 53.

⁷⁸ Baranek, Chan, and Ericson, *Visualizing Deviance*, 7.

probably on Ecstasy,”⁷⁹ or “She’s ruining these other people’s lives,”⁸⁰ were counted as articles that contained victim blaming statements and perpetuated the ‘she asked for it’ myth. Conversely, any article that mentioned the victim as strong and attempted to frame the rape within the broader context of rape culture was flagged as attempting to break out of the paradigm of victim blame.

Articles where the rape was referred to as something “police had never seen before” and “disgusting”, “morally corrupt,” “criminal,” and “sickening,”⁸¹ were categorized as perpetuating the rape as aberrant myth. Language that situated the perpetrators as acting outside social norms gave the impression that the rape, while tragic, is not indicative of a rape culture and thus served to individualize the crime.

Articles that repeatedly warned about date rape drugs and/or mentioned that the victim was raped at a party were read as statements that attempted to divert attention away from the problem of sexual violence and onto the problem of drug and alcohol abuse. Drugs were also mentioned in tandem with the fact that the rape took place “at a rave, where the victim was taken outside the party then attacked.”⁸² These warnings, though no doubt well-intentioned, give the impression that women need to protect themselves from rape. If they engage in bad behaviour, (partying, drinking), then unfortunately rape can occur. The repeat mentions of drugs and the rave indicates to the reader that individual behaviour contributed to the rape. As Marian Meyers writes, “news reports informed by the police warnings make it clear to women what actions and

⁷⁹ Rod Mickleburgh and Wendy Stueck, “After alleged gang rape, teen’s parent ‘a ball of rage;’ Graphic photos of alleged assault posted online prompt debate about whether teens are increasingly desensitized by social networking.” *The Globe and Mail*. 18 September 2010.

⁸⁰ Quan, “Victim’s peers.”

⁸¹ Luymes, “Gang-rape photos.”

⁸² “BC-Rave-Gang-Rape-Update.” *The Canadian Press*. 16 September 2010.

locations are unsafe, influencing decisions about where to go, what to wear, how to act, how late to stay out.”⁸³

Lastly, articles that wrote about the “de-sensitized youth,”⁸⁴ and put forth the notion that “technology can have a dark side,”⁸⁵ were coded as displacing blame for the rapes on technology rather than on rape culture and the individuals that perpetrated the crime. Articles that talked about the corrupting influence of technology and Facebook were counted as directing discussion away from the broader issue of rape culture, onto a conversation about the need for regulation of social media for youth.

The following chapter will provide a brief literature review of the discourses of rape, and rape law, in order to provide contextual backing for an analysis of the media coverage of Pitt Meadows.

Chapter Three: Rape Law and the Discourses of Rape

Before analyzing the Pitt Meadows gang rape, the rape and subsequent media reaction must be contextualized within rape law and feminist responses to the discourse of rape. The following chapter will examine how perspectives of rape changed from the mid-70s through today, how feminist scholars have contextualized rape, and how they have proposed to combat it. A review of the scholarship on the discourses of rape and rape law in North America will provide a theoretical framework to underpin my analysis of the Pitt Meadows gang rape.

Situating the rapes within feminist discourse and legal scholarship surrounding consent can provide a context for the reactions of the victim’s peers to her rape. Why was her rape viewed as consensual by some of her peers? Why were the police adamant that

⁸³ Meyers, *News Coverage*, 67.

⁸⁴ Todd, “Internet gang rape.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the victim could not consent because of her intoxication? These responses are not created in a vacuum, and the legal battles and discussions that have come before provide a lens through which the reader can view the Pitt Meadows gang rape. Specifically, feminist discourse surrounding consent and rape is an important dialectic to note. The purpose of this chapter is to challenge the idea that law has been a neutral body of knowledge on what constitutes rape, just as the media has not been neutral on how rape and rape victim has been framed in newspaper coverage.

This chapter will begin by examining earlier forms of rape analysis like Susan Brownmiller's groundbreaking book Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, as well as Susan Estrich's Real Rape, Carol Smart's The Power of Law, the Ewanchuk decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, Elizabeth Sheehy and Christine Boyle's work on Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, and scholar Sharon Marcus's work on interrupting the narrative of rape. I will also discuss Helen Benedict and Marian Meyers and others, who write about the employment of rape myths in popular culture. These two studies work in tandem with this chapter's review of rape scholarship to form the theoretical contextualization of the Pitt Meadows media analysis.

Susan Brownmiller: Establishing a History of Rape

Susan Brownmiller's 1975 book Against Our Will was groundbreaking not only for its ambition and historical breadth, but for its powerful argument that rape is a historical and socio-political tool of power and oppression. Rather than positing that rape extends from an overwhelming and uncontrollable male lust, Brownmiller notes that men's structural capacity to rape has in fact been used to strengthen and fortify a patriarchal system. As she writes,

It seems eminently sensible to hypothesize that man's violent capture and rape of the female led first to the establishment of a rudimentary male-protectorate and then later to the full-blown male solidification of power, the patriarchy...man's forcible extension of his boundaries to his mate and later to his offspring was the beginning of his concept of ownership.⁸⁶

By linking rape to ownership of the female body and then to the broader concepts of political and economic ownership, Brownmiller creates an origin story of rape. In questioning and excavating the possible reasoning for why and how men began to rape, she begins to create a historical and political contextualization for rape's influence and prevalence in society.

Brownmiller argues that the conquest of male physical strength over supposed female physical weakness was not only a victory in the biological sense, but also a way to fortify male power. As Brownmiller further explains, "his forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood."⁸⁷ In developing a language and 'history' of rape, Brownmiller politicizes rape and explicates an act that had previously resisted much examination and thought. In a sense, Brownmiller creates a new discourse and dialectic of rape. This new discourse is free from previous iterations, which held mainly that rape victims were either 'hysterical' attention seekers or women of 'questionable' backgrounds and morals. As Elaine Crovitz wrote in a review of Against Our Will,

A compendium on rape, such as this, has never been attempted before...Historians have tended to slight incidents of rape as exaggerations, as isolated incidents, or as unverifiable...The psychoanalytic concepts of 'fantasies of rape' and the 'Electra complex' only serve to make women fear reporting

⁸⁶ Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

rape as such ideas have come to give 'scientific sanction' to the age-old prejudice that women 'make-up' tales of rape.⁸⁸

In extricating rape from traditional canons that either ignored, explained away, or ridiculed reports of rape, Brownmiller put rape on the discursive map. In doing so, she attempted to explain women's subjugation and oppression by means of a historical analysis of rape adapted to modern day realities. Brownmiller frees rape of its links to sexuality, thus asserting rape's links with power and aggression and its ability to fortify certain bonds of social order, (i.e., marriage). Brownmiller establishes rape as a legitimate political and social force.⁸⁹

As much as Brownmiller asserts that men have the capacity to rape, she also posits that women are socialized and indeed raised to be victims of rape. She writes, "[w]omen are trained to be rape victims. To simply learn the term rape is to take instruction in the power relationship between male and females... girls get raped, not boys. Rape has something to do with our sex. Rape is something awful that happens to females."⁹⁰ By socializing women to be victims of rape, or promoting the expectation of rape, Brownmiller argues that society and social norms instill fear in women, thereby further subjugating them to the will of men. Passivity, docility, and other "good" qualities that are said to make up the feminine character are rewarded with "social approval."⁹¹ Thus, advice that women should passively accept rape also serves to oppress and subjugate women.

With an eye to the institutional and social effects of patriarchy and rape, Brownmiller argues in the final pages of Against Our Will that changes should be made

⁸⁸ Elaine Crovitz, "Review Essay." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 39.1 (February 1977), 203

⁸⁹ Brownmiller, *Against*, 209.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 310.

to rape law and rape trials. She writes, “reform of rape trials should include calling a halt to procedures which try to establish consent and resistance, using force and injury and the threat of force instead as a gauge for the crime. Most especially, a stop must be made to the review of a woman’s past sexual history during a trial ...”⁹² Brownmiller’s contributions to the discourses of rape emphasize rape as a site of power and oppression, rather than merely a sexual act gone awry. By establishing the political, historical and social basis for rape, Brownmiller helped pave the way for future feminist responses to rape, acknowledging it as a legitimate avenue for feminist analysis.

Susan Estrich: ‘Real Rape,’ versus ‘Simple Rape’

Brownmiller’s emphasis on the need to reform how courts and the law view consent was later addressed by Susan Estrich in her influential work Real Rape. Estrich argues for a shift in how courts, the law, and society respond to what she calls simple rape. In the beginning of her book, Estrich first notes that she herself was a victim of rape - not of the “simple” kind but what she calls a “real rape,” a rape by a complete stranger during a carjacking. She writes, “the most important thing was that he was stranger, that he approached me not only armed but uninvited; that he was after my money and my car... I am lucky because everyone agrees that I was ‘really’ raped. When I tell my story, no one doubts my status as victim. No one suggests that I was ‘asking for it.’”⁹³ Estrich notes that her rape was considered real by police and friends alike because it was committed by a stranger. That stranger happened to be black; the rapist used a weapon, and Estrich had been grocery shopping, an activity innocuous enough to remove any blame.

⁹² Ibid., 370.

⁹³ Susan Estrich, Real Rape. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 3.

However, Estrich focuses not on victims of real rape, but the many other women who deal with simple rape. Estrich defines simple rape cases as those in which “a single defendant ... knew his victim and neither beat her nor threatened her with a weapon...”⁹⁴ Estrich argues that it is in these simple rape cases that women are less likely to be believed by juries and more likely to be distrusted by the courts. In events where the woman appeared to have acted out “contributory behaviour...juries were willing to go to extremes in their leniency toward the defendant, even when judges considered the evidence sufficient to support a conviction for rape.”⁹⁵

Estrich argues that there is a double standard in treatment of real rape victims, and a victim who has been raped by neighbours, friends, or acquaintances without considerable physical harm. It would appear that simple rape cases have been put at a disadvantage in the eyes of the law, although *de jure* rape victims of both types would appear to be equal under the law. Estrich writes, “what the law seems to say and what it has been in practice are two different things. In fact, the law’s abhorrence of the rapist in stranger cases like mine has been matched only by the distrust of the victim who claims to be raped by a friend...”⁹⁶

In describing the perils of the simple rape case victim, Estrich describes the law of rape as a “male rape fantasy”⁹⁷ that has turned into a nightmare. Much like Brownmiller’s assertion that rape originated as a connection to male power and the patriarchy, Estrich argues that the derision and scrutiny heaped on the victim of simple rapes is based on the classic rape fantasy about women’s “supposed desire to be forcibly ravished, to ‘enjoy’

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 5.

sex without taking responsibility for it.”⁹⁸ Because of this, the crime of rape has been defined “so as to require proof of actual physical resistance by the victim, as well as substantial force by the man. Evidentiary rules have been defined to require corroboration of the victim’s account, to penalize women who do not complain promptly, and to ensure the relevance of women’s prior history of unchastity.”⁹⁹ In short, Estrich argues that the courts are unjustly structured against cases of simple rape. She attempts to analyze and prove this disparity in the hopes that her case studies and statistics will incite large-scale change not only in the courts, but also in society at large. By confronting the history of simple rape acknowledging that these rapes are in fact real, and fighting this tacit access to women’s bodies, Estrich illustrates that law is both part of the problem and part of the solution.

One of the main ideas behind finding a solution rooted in law is the argument that the courts put the onus of ensuring consent on the man’s shoulders. As Mary Becker writes, “Estrich’s most important suggestion is that a woman’s “no” should mean no. Whether the case is simple or aggravated rape, the focus should be on whether the man acted reasonably, and the reasonable man should interpret any woman’s “no” (including his wife’s) as no.”¹⁰⁰ By holding men to a higher standard of self-control and reasonableness, Estrich argues, the crime of rape would be laid bare before their eyes. She writes, “in effect, the law would impose a duty on men to open their eyes and use their heads before engaging in sex - not to read a woman’s mind, but to give her credit for knowing it herself when she speaks it.”¹⁰¹ Estrich’s contribution to rape literature charts

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Becker, “Review.” *Ethics*. 99.2. (January 1989), 443.

¹⁰¹ Estrich. *Real Rape*. 98.

the mistreatment of victims of simple rape through rape trials and the courts, reveals the many damaging consequences of it, and seeks to inspire change in both society and the law. Estrich's argument that no should mean no comes into play when studying the public reaction to the Pitt Meadows rape case. Though the police stated the victim was intoxicated and could not consent, her own peers' reactions indicated that her "no" was insufficient. These diverging opinions about the consent of the Pitt Meadows victim will be explored further in the following chapters.

To Estrich, the law is clearly a means of achieving positive change, and promoting progress in dealing with understanding, and preventing rape. However, other feminist voices in rape literature question the use of the courts as a means to achieve alternative modes of power, arguing persuasively that the courts themselves serve as a mechanism for maintaining and asserting the status quo. These scholars have argued that the courts only serve to absorb alternate discourses into a larger hegemonic discourse of power.

Carol Smart: The Hierarchy of Knowledge and the Power of Law

Carol Smart is another seminal feminist scholar who has contributed to the canon of rape and law, and who has explored the validity and usefulness of accessing law as a means toward feminist inspired social change. While Estrich and Brownmiller posit that a change to rape law and the legal system may ease the path for women faced with complex and harsh rape trials, Smart questions whether the system of law can be used to achieve feminist gains. As critic Lisa Brush writes, "Smart's work raises a crucial question for both feminist jurisprudence and feminist state theory: Can feminist social

and political ends be pursued through ‘establishment’ means?”¹⁰² Smart, noting the strong theoretical influence of Michel Foucault and his work on power and knowledge, argues that accessing legal discourse will not necessarily forward feminist gains. Although it may be a discourse of legitimate power and knowledge, the law’s power and claims to truth and knowledge “[enable] it to silence women (who encounter law) and feminists (who challenge law).”¹⁰³ The ability to silence women, says Smart, exists because law is constituted through a discourse of power, which has made claims to “scientificity and hence truth. This in turn positions law in a hierarchy of knowledges, which allows for the disqualification of ‘subjugated knowledges...’”¹⁰⁴ This subjugated knowledge (feminism) is thus positioned as a lesser form of truth, incapable of competing with the authoritative claims of law. In addition to law’s universal claim to truth and power in legal discourse, Smart asserts that women have been sexed and gendered by law, and this comes into play in rape trials.

Part of this sexing, argues Smart, is a culture that is influenced by phallocentrism, a concept that was also addressed in Brownmiller’s work and has been taken up by feminists in an attempt to expose the patriarchal bias of legal discourse. Smart writes,

Phallocentrism plays into ideas about rape... Within phallogentric culture sexuality is always presumed to be heterosexuality... In turn this (hetero) sexuality is overdetermined by the prioritized activity of intercourse and its satisfactions become synonymous with the pleasures of the phallus... Female sexual pleasure is constructed as unreliable or incomprehensible (or even voracious and insatiable) in a phallogentric culture.¹⁰⁵

Thus, rape trials that focus on the victim’s sexual past by searching for inconsistencies or

¹⁰² Lisa Brush, “The Curious Courtship of Feminist Jurisprudence and Feminist State Theory: Smart on the Power of Law.” *Law and Social Inquiry*, 19.4. (Autumn 1994), 1068.

¹⁰³ Carol Smart, “Law’s Power, the Sexed Body, and Feminist Discourse.” *Journal of Law and Society*, 17.2. (Summer 1990), 195.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 205

a proclivity for casual sex are constructed on the phallogentric notion of the unreliability of female sexuality. The idea that women might be afraid to admit their pleasure, and thus cry rape in order to maintain some pretense of femininity, furthers the notion that women cannot be trusted when it comes to rape claims. In the context of this phallogentric culture, “women are understood to be guardians of what men want, but of which they have little understanding... it is within these dominant regimes of meaning that law presides over contested accounts of rape and seduction.”¹⁰⁶

Coinciding with the influence of phallogentric culture on accounts of rape, Smart also discusses the sexing of the female body. This sexualization of women transcends mere biology and enters the discursive realm. The female body thus becomes inscribed with meaning and particular values that say as much about their physical characterization as their psychology. Not only are woman sexualized, they are placed within a binary systems (man/woman, rational/irrational) which place them at a disadvantage in the eyes of the law. As Smart writes, “situated on a binary they not only construct differences, they construct different values... Moreover, as there is little room for a discursive escape from female embodiment (that is, from being a biological woman) there is little room to escape the other (negative) attributes.”¹⁰⁷ The rape trial, argues Smart, can be an extension and an expression of what we know about the discourses of men and women. The rape trial, in a sense, becomes the stage that “confirms what we already ‘know’ about (hetero) sex, namely that men have uncontrollable urges and natural desires and that woman may only passively consent.”¹⁰⁸

Although Smart acknowledges that feminists have used the words of rape victims

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 206.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 203.

and their abuse by the courts in order to attempt change in legal discourse, she argues that allowing the terrifying ordeal of rape victims to become the only account of rape has placed rape victims in a theoretical and discursive paradox:

The story of rape that is told is of a humiliating, degrading, depersonalizing, and terrifying ordeal. This is the language many women use. Looking at it one way this language merely 'gives voice' to the experience. From a deconstructionist position, however, the experience is already constructed in language - a language which is part of the formation of the subjectivity of womanhood. It is a language that wins moral support and empowers the speaker. It is the language of the moral crusades of the nineteenth century which constructed women and children as the victims of the lusts of debauched and unrestrained men. It is therefore an account that has a specific history and culture.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, the language that posits women as the constantly sexed and eternal rape victim serves to repeat and reinstate law's 'sexing' of the female body back into feminist discourse. If women's experience of rape is consistently framed as occurring within a phallogentric culture, and feminists buttress that culture by maintaining the same narrative, then according to Smart there can be no possibility of 'de-sexing' women's bodies in feminist discourse. To accept and situate the experience of the rape trial within a 'sexed' discourse is "to promulgate the larger culture's belief that sex is the measure of identity and the instrument of truth. In the former (discourse of humiliation, degradation) the body becomes the eternal victim, in the latter (law) the deserving victim. Neither discourse empowers."¹¹⁰ Smart posits that there may be an alternative narrative of rape to pose to the courts that might allow some room for empowerment for women, and transcendence of biologically determined arguments. This alternative narrative would de-sex and unpack the concept of natural womanhood in order to truly deconstruct law's truth about women, rather than promulgating a narrative that plays into the binary

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

assumptions of legal discourse.

However, Smart notes that there are some dangers to this strategy. She suggests that an attempt to yield an alternative narrative to the rape trial could end with the elimination of what little progress has been made on the accounts of female victimhood. She writes, “a feminist discourse which might attempt to construct rape differently, which might attempt to deconstruct the biological/sexed woman, is silenced by the apparition of law's sexed woman to whose survival it is unwillingly tied. This means that the more we focus on law as the problem and solution, the more we are drawn into a paradox.”¹¹¹ This paradox is problematic when attempting to free the sexed female body from the confines of legal discourse, while also acknowledging that sex distinctions in legal discourse have been a powerful lens through which rape trials have been viewed. Thus, the cure for the sexed women of rape trials may in fact have more dire consequences than the disease itself.

Sharon Marcus also addresses this need for an alternative discourse for rape, proposing that “we understand rape as a language and use this insight to imagine a woman as neither already raped nor inherently rapable.”¹¹² Marcus criticized Brownmiller's claims to the inevitable biological capacity of men to rape, and their ability to do so seemingly at will. She writes, “such a view takes violence as a self-explanatory first cause and endows it with an invulnerable and terrifying facticity which stymies our ability to challenge and demystify rape.”¹¹³ While Smart noted the paradoxical discourse of feminists who cling to arguments of biologism when addressing

¹¹¹ Ibid., 208.

¹¹² Sharon Marcus, “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention.” Feminists Theorize the Political. Judith Butler and Joan Scott eds. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 387.

¹¹³ Ibid.

rape trials, Marcus also bristles at language that has made rape an ominous and omnipresent threat in women's lives. Marcus argues for a more useful strategy to prevent rape: rather than persuading men not to rape through legal means, society should empower women to "sabotage men's power to rape,"¹¹⁴ thus situating anti-rape prevention strategies outside legal discourse. Marcus envisions that feminists might begin to treat rape as a product of language, a narrative or a script that can be disrupted. Recognizing the scripts of rape means recognizing the way language has been used to support rape, and Marcus posits that women should take steps to displace their fear of being raped with the assertiveness needed to interrupt the rape script with actions or words. As Marcus writes, "we can begin to develop a feminist discourse on rape by displacing the emphasis on what the rape script promotes male violence against women - and putting into place... women's will, agency, and capacity for violence."¹¹⁵ This means doing away with language that emphasizes the inherent vulnerability of women to rape, and replacing it with tools to fight back with words and actions.

Smart's work on rape trials and Marcus's work on developing a new feminist discourse surrounding rape, attempt to nuance the usefulness of law in achieving feminist ends. Questioning how and why feminist rape narratives have seemingly played into a binary and sexed discourse can be useful in allowing openings for alternative narratives to enter feminist discourse surrounding rape. Questioning the eternally "rapable" and constantly terrorized woman allows new avenues for empowerment and social change outside of police and the law. Though Smart and Marcus have questioned the use of law and legal discourse for feminist ends, there have been a few key court decisions that have

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 388.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 395.

influenced and changed how rape trials can proceed. In Canada, one of these decisions is the Supreme Court decision on consent in the Ewanchuk trial.

R. v. Ewanchuk: Defence of Implied Consent

The case of R. v. Ewanchuk involves a 1999 Supreme Court decision on the defence of consent to a charge of rape. Defendant Steven Ewanchuk was charged with sexual assault for taking a 17-year-old woman to his van for a job interview, where he proceeded to make sexual advances towards her. While the woman said she said no to his initial advances, Ewanchuk argued that she did not continue to say no, and therefore there was “implied consent.”¹¹⁶ The Alberta Court of Appeal upheld the initial acquittal of charges by way of implied consent, and Justice John McClung of the Alberta Court of Appeal stated in his decision that, “it must be pointed out that the complainant did not present herself to Ewanchuk or enter his trailer in a bonnet and crinolines...”¹¹⁷ McClung’s insinuation that the woman was not exactly a good girl wronged, was addressed and criticized by Justice Claire L’Heureux-Dubé in the Supreme Court decision that overturned McClung’s ruling. As Boyle and Sheehy write, “L’Heureux-Dubé itemized and rejected the rape mythology that informed the trial judge’s analysis of facts and law and more blatantly, those rape myths and prohibited inferences repeatedly invoked by McClung...”¹¹⁸ The Supreme Court ruled that there could be no such thing as implied consent, and that the concept of implied consent was “inconsistent with the protection of the physical and psychological integrity of women against sexual assault... the Crown need only prove that the woman did not voluntarily agree to the contact in her own

¹¹⁶ Christine Boyle and Elizabeth Sheehy. “Justice L’Heureux-Dube and Canadian Sexual Assault Law: Resisting the Privatization of Rape.” Adding Feminism to Law: The Contributions of Justice Claire L’Heureux-Dubé, Elizabeth Sheehy ed. (Toronto: Irwin Law, 2004), 260.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 263.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 262.

mind.”¹¹⁹

Justice L’Heureux-Dubé went even further in her comments on the ruling, arguing that sexual assault is a human rights issue, that the evidentiary burden of consent should fall on the accused, and that the accused must prove that he took reasonable steps to ensure consent. L’Heureux-Dubé also took on McClung’s assertion that a woman’s ambiguous conduct may be used against her in court. This remark, made in McClung’s ruling, indicated that any ambiguous actions of the woman could be used to support the perpetrator’s defence of implied consent. L’Heureux-Dubé posited that this reliance on proving implied consent would serve to suggest that “women are walking around this country in a state of constant consent to sexual activity,”¹²⁰ and further emphasized that McClung’s ruling relied on myths and stereotypes about women and sex. The decision, along with McClung and L’Heureux-Dubé’s remarks, were met with controversy. In the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling, McClung singled out L’Heureux-Dubé and her comments in an article in the *National Post*, suggesting that she had a feminist agenda and that her rulings helped cause a spate of male suicides in Quebec. He retracted his comments after discovering that Justice L’Heureux-Dubé’s husband had committed suicide.¹²¹ The Ewanchuk ruling was extremely important for discourses of rape and law in Canada, not only because it set a precedent for rebutting the concept of implied consent, but also for L’Heureux-Dubé’s artful and eloquent articulations on the influence of rape myths and stereotypes in law. By framing sexual assault as a human rights issue, not as an issue of privacy and private property, and by noting that rape as a crime affects Canadian women unequally, progress was made toward ensuring equality for rape

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 263.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Shawn Ohler, “Judge apologizes for ‘cruel’ attack on senior justice.” *National Post*. 2 March 1999.

victims in the face of a prejudicial legal system.

Consent was a key issue in the Pitt Meadows rape case. Although the victim was intoxicated, and despite police repeatedly informing the media and public that this was a rape, some students made comments that indicated they believed the rapes to be consensual sex. Negative comments about the victim were posted under the rape images on Facebook, and one of the victim's peers was quoted as saying the victim was "ruining these guy's lives."¹²² Because of the victim's behaviour the night of the rape and the fact she was perceived as willingly going to the field with the accused, this was taken as proof of implied consent to have sex with several men. Although rulings like *R. v. Ewanchuk* have helped define what consent means under the law, media coverage and public reaction to Pitt Meadows suggests that the concept of "consent" reflect public attitudes towards rape. Before examining those public attitudes, there is a necessary dimension to this discussion that must be addressed: how rape and race have been discussed by feminist scholars. Though race did not come up in the Pitt Meadows case, a discussion of the discourses of rape is not complete without addressing the way rape and race have interacted and become intertwined in feminist scholarship. I believe that if race were a factor in the Pitt Meadows gang rape it would have been framed and covered differently. Thus, a short discussion on how rape and race have been intertwined in feminist scholarship adds important context to any media analysis of rape.

Discourses of Rape and Race

There is a great deal of important theoretical research on the topic of rape and race. Kimberlee Crenshaw, Sharon Marcus and Sherene Razack have all written about gendered and racialized violence in both the United States and Canada, and the topic is

¹²² Quan, "Victim's peers."

briefly discussed in Estrich's Real Rape and Brownmiller's Against Our Will. Much discussion has focused on the apparent legal bias in cases of interracial rape. As Marcus writes, "interracial rape cases constitute a minority of rapes committed and rapes brought to trial, but when the rapist is white, exhibit significantly lower rates of conviction than interracial rape cases, and much higher rates of conviction when the rapist is Afro-American."¹²³ The history of the rape of black women by white men, the judicial system's extreme punishment of black men accused of raping white women, and the lenient attitude taken towards white rape of black women was expertly documented in Danielle McGuire's recent book At The Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance. McGuire documents case after legal case in which white rapists walked free after raping black women, sometimes very violently, whereas black men received life sentences or were killed for even the mere allegation of a rape of a white woman. She writes, "in the segregated American South, a white man could rape a black woman with little fear of legal or social recourse, and black women lived in a persistent state of apprehension. Rape was used as a weapon of terror in the subjugation of black women, their families and whole communities."¹²⁴ Current scholarship suggests that race continues to play a role in how rape is viewed by the courts and society. In their study of ten major rape cases between 1980 and 1996, Joanne Ardovini-Brooker and Susan Caringella-MacDonald studied offender blaming and victim blaming statements by the media in cases of rape. They found that in the three cases where the rapist and rape victim were of a different race, a minority victim was highly blamed for her rape. However,

¹²³ Marcus, 398.

¹²⁴ Danielle McGuire, At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance- A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 20.

when minority offenders attacked a white victim there was minimal victim blaming statements.¹²⁵ They state, “when interpreting the findings in this fashion, we observe that offenders were most highly scrutinized and condemned when they were minority group members who attacked white victims.”¹²⁶

Scholar and activist Angela Davis also notes that myths of black women as promiscuous were and still are inextricably tied to myths about the black male rapist. She writes, “If black men are vested with animal-like sexual urges, black women likewise are vested with bestiality.”¹²⁷ This means that minority victims of rape are further stigmatized by myths not only about women (women ask to be raped, want to be raped), but also that as women of colour they are somehow more deserving of rape. The discourse surrounding rape and race and the divisions it has caused between feminists is important, but will not be addressed in the Pitt Meadows case study. The victim and the perpetrators appear to be white: as their race and class were not mentioned in news coverage, it can be reasonably assumed that the victim and perpetrators were of roughly the same race and economic class. However, the lack of media discussion of race and class in this case is interesting given the over-emphasis on rape and class in other major gang rape cases in Cleveland, Texas,¹²⁸ where a Hispanic girl was raped by a group of young black men; in Richmond, California,¹²⁹ where a white woman was raped by a

¹²⁵ Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald, “Media Attributions of Blame,” 14.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁷ Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Male Rapist.” Women, Race, and Class. (New York: Vintage, 1983).

¹²⁸ Jessica Hopper, “Gang Rape of 11-year-old girl Sparks Racial Tensions in Texas Town.” *ABC News*. 10 March 2011.

¹²⁹ Henry K. Lee, “Richmond High reels from girl’s gang rape.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. 27 October 2009.

group of young Hispanic males, and in the Big Dan Rape case,¹³⁰ where a white woman was raped by a group of men of Portuguese descent.

Rape Law: An Avenue for Meaningful Change?

A review of the literature surrounding the discourses of rape and rape law reveals a complicated and multi-faceted reading of how rape has been explored by feminist scholars. The interplay between these discourses and current case studies reveals telling schisms between the concept of consent enshrined in law and the realities of rape and rape victims. While Brownmiller, Estrich, et al. believe that changes to attitudes surrounding rape can be made manifest through progress in legal discourse, others like Smart are skeptical that law, intent on maintaining the status quo, can be a means of change. How these discourses collude with - or are underpinned by - persistent rape myths in popular culture paints a hodge-podge picture of progress and regression; the lines of consent, non-consent and blame still seem blurry to many. For example, Pitt Meadows police insisted that someone intoxicated and semi-conscious could not legally consent to sex, yet the victim was bullied by her peers in the media and in the classroom because some students believed her behaviour suggested consent to sex. This type of incongruous response seems to indicate that progress toward feminist perspectives in law does not always immediately translate to wider society. The discourses of rape continue to be written and re-written by law, academia, society, and media. An analysis of how rape is reported, and how this is influenced by the discourses of rape and rape law, is a useful project in ensuring that such discourses and their appearance in various social institutions do not go unexamined.

¹³⁰ "The Crime that Tarnished a Town: New Bedford's gang-rape case goes to trial." Time Magazine. 5 March 1984.

In addition to scholarly responses like Estrich, Smart, Brownmiller, Davis, and Marcus to rape law and the discourses of rape, there is also a large body of work developed on the way rape and rape myths have proliferated through media and popular culture. Just as Estrich defined what was considered real rape in the courts, so have the media defined what constitutes both a “good” and a “bad” rape victim.

Chapter IV: Analysis of Pitt Meadows: The Victim as Battleground

The gang rape of the 16-year-old girl in Pitt Meadows disturbed many, not only because of the violent nature of the crime, but because of the reaction the crime received amongst the victim's peers and the Internet. After police were notified of the rapes, they struggled to convince some students to take the images and video of the rape off of the social networking site Facebook. This chapter will discuss and analyze the common themes and frames that emerged from the print news coverage of this crime and address the five research questions outlined in the beginning of this thesis. Among other findings, it will illustrate the ways in which a victim blaming narrative emerged from Pitt Meadows coverage. This thesis asserts that victim blaming did occur in the coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape, and that very few articles attempted to construct a counter narrative to the crime that would allow space for empowerment and agency for the victim. An overview of most notable themes is outlined in the paragraphs below, followed by a more in-depth discussion of themes and findings in the following chapter.

The Pitt Meadows gang rape contains many elements which would make it difficult to imagine how print media and the audience could construct a victim blaming frame for the girl; the police supported the victim's statements, and images and video of the attack were posted online. However, an analysis of 43 print articles written between September 10 and October 10th reveal this theme, especially in cases where posts from social networking sites were cited as sources. Articles came from a variety of both local and national sources: *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *National Post*, the *Vancouver Sun*, *The Canadian Press*, *The Province*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Postmedia*, *CBC News online*, and *CTV News online* all covered the Pitt Meadows gang rape. It was

reported at the time the victim was given the date rape drug (which later proved not to be true)¹³¹, police stated that there was no way the victim could have consented to any sexual activity; and she was far outnumbered by her attackers and witnesses. Despite this, some of her peers held her personally responsible for the rapes. Some were quoted speaking out in support of the attackers, stating that they believed the rapes to be consensual, as the victim appeared to be conscious in the video and photographic evidence. One of the most notable examples was a quote from the girl's peers in an interview with a *National Post* reporter stating that the victim was "ruining these other people's lives"¹³² by reporting the crime. This quote was then discussed and reprinted in a number of print media that wrote about the victim's friends and their reaction to the crime.

The analysis of the print coverage reveals the employment of the myth that the rapes were sex and were perceived as consensual by some of the girl's peers. Some Pitt Meadows students evoked the 'she asked for it' myth by suggesting the victim only reported the crime afterwards because she was embarrassed. Their reaction to the crime stunned many of the police officers working the case, including Sergeant Jennifer Hyland, who called the rapes and the subsequent reposting of photos, "one of the most disgusting and disturbing crimes I've ever investigated."¹³³ The commonality and usage of the terms such as "disgusting," "monster," and "animals," while describing the crime, social media, and the attackers, also seems to point to the utilization of the 'rape as aberrant' myth. These findings indicate that both the victim's father as reported by several print sources and police discursively situated the attackers as a group of deranged

¹³¹ Saltman, "Victim Bullied."

¹³² Quan, "Girl's Friends."

¹³³ Luymes, "Gang Rape Photos."

individuals acting out in a crazed rampage, rather than situate their behaviour and actions within the broader framework of a society that perpetuates and sanctions acts of sexual violence. And lastly, another theme that emerged was ‘social media as morally corrupting,’ meaning partial blame for the attack was placed on technology and its ability to desensitize youths to violence and crime.¹³⁴ In this theme blame for the rapes was shifted away from the perpetrators and placed on the more amorphous threat of technology, thus serving to obscure and displace the perpetrators of their central agency in the rape. Nevertheless, despite some of this disturbing coverage, there was one article that placed the gang rape within the broader context of rape culture and mentioned it as a contributing factor.¹³⁵ Although there was only one article that mentioned rape culture directly, the fact that it was present could possibly speak to a conscious attempt by media to infuse the victim blame narrative with a counterframe that challenged the girl’s peers and their account of the crime.

An analysis of the 43 articles in Canadian newspapers and online written on the Pitt Meadows gang rape yielded some fascinating results that help illustrate how print media cover crimes of sexual violence. While victim blame came less from police and the journalists themselves, the police and media’s reliance on the physical evidence of rape, and the construction of the articles that focused on the debate between the victim and her peers, created a discourse that focused more on the victim’s actions and veracity of her claims, than the actions of her perpetrators. In fact, rarely were the perpetrators mentioned, except only in broad strokes of narrative that focused on the “sickening,

¹³⁴ Todd, “Internet gang rape.”

¹³⁵ Zerbisias, “Are mass media.”

disgusting, and appalling”¹³⁶ nature of the crimes and of youth morality as a whole. Conversely, the victim was repeatedly mentioned as both hero and villain, with family and friends, most notably her father, acting as character witnesses to her “wit and strength.”¹³⁷ Alternative discourses were rarely explored in the coverage, except in one stand-alone piece by the *Toronto Star*, the only article and paper to mention rape culture as a potential causal factor of sexual violence. There were a few other articles that pointed to Internet pornography as “de-sensitizing youth,”¹³⁸ but few mentioned a culture that accepts and reifies rape myths as a potential factor in the occurrence of rape. The above themes will be discussed more fully in the pages below.

Rape by ‘Monsters:’ De-humanizing the Invisible Rapist

While the Pitt Meadows gang rape was no doubt a horrifying crime, the language used to describe sexual assault, and its perpetrators, can have an othering effect on the individuals involved and the news coverage. As discussed in the previous chapters, if the attacker(s) is seen as acting outside of socially acceptable norms, then the crime of rape can be seen as something aberrant, unusual, perpetrated by sick men acting as lone wolves. Though gang rape is less common than rape perpetuated by a single attacker, recent high-profile gang rape cases¹³⁹ illustrate that gang rape continues to occur and be covered by mainstream news sources. The language and disgust of the police towards the violence and heinous nature of the crime discursively situates the act outside the boundaries of normal behaviour, which Benedict says can, “obscure the social, cultural

¹³⁶ “Gang Rape,” *CTV News* online print version.

¹³⁷ Quan, “Victim’s peers.”

¹³⁸ Quan, “Girl’s Friends.”

¹³⁹ In 2011, the *New York Times* reported on the gang rape of an 11-year-old girl in Cleveland, Texas on several occasions by 15-20 young men. The rapes were recorded on a Smartphone and passed around the school. Another high profile gang rape case occurred in 2009 in Richmond, California. A 15-year-old girl was raped at a school dance by a group of men. There were 20 witnesses, none of them called the police.

and structural elements that cause and facilitate rape within a rape culture.”¹⁴⁰ Though it has been argued that the coverage of violent crime in all its gory details serves the public good in that it unveils the horrors of crime,¹⁴¹ the perpetual portrayal of rape as a singular horrific act can send the message that rape is aberrant and perpetrated by monsters and psychopaths. If this is true, then as long as you act like a good girl, you will be protected from rape. “Sick,” “disgusting,” morally corrupt,” appalling,”¹⁴² these are all terms that were used when describing the Pitt Meadow rapes. Sgt. Jennifer Hyland, RCMP, was repeatedly quoted as saying, “I’ve never seen anything like it before. (The situation) is disgusting, morally corrupt and criminal...It is so socially corrupt it is sickening,”¹⁴³ while other police statements called the crime “one of the most disturbing sexual assault cases they have ever seen.”¹⁴⁴ “I’ve been involved in investigating sexual assaults for many years,” Sgt. Jennifer Hyland was quoted as saying. “In that time, I’ve never experienced anything like what is occurring in this investigation.”¹⁴⁵ In fact, this language and particular quotations were used in 25 per cent of the news stories, 11 out of the 43 articles with the words ‘appalling’ and ‘sickening’ often used in the headline. Also notable, the majority of the news articles written about the rape mentioned in the first paragraphs that the girl was drugged at a party prior to the assault. The discursive implications of this will be discussed further, but the consistent mention of drugs along with the terms ‘appalling’ and ‘sickening,’ functions not only as positioning the rape and

¹⁴⁰ Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp*, 17.

¹⁴¹ Steven Gorelick, “Cosmology of Fear.” *The Culture of Crime*. Craig Lamay and Everette Dennis eds. (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 18.

¹⁴² “Gang Rape.” *CTV New* online print version.

¹⁴³ Luymes, “Gang-rape photos.”

¹⁴⁴ Douglas Quan, “Gang rape photos ‘add insult to injury:’ father; Images posted on web evidence of teens attitude toward crime.” *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 September 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Garry Bellett, Andrea Woo and Tiffany Crawford, “Photos of teen’s rape by gang go viral on the Internet; Police appeal for halt to spread of ‘disgusting child pornography.’” *Vancouver Sun*, 17 September 2010.

the perpetrator's actions as aberrant, but also calls attention to actions of the victim that may have contributed to her rape.

When reporting on rape, it is important to pay attention to not only what the articles are saying, but also whom the articles are quoting as sources in positions of power. Police, RCMP, experts, and the victim's father spoke to the "depravity and moral decline,"¹⁴⁶ of the attackers, while victim blaming and "she asked for it,"¹⁴⁷ came from the victim's peers, and most of these comments were made online. Though many would argue that Hyland's words were apt, positioning the perpetrators, not the actions themselves, as sick and morally corrupt gives the impression that these men were acting outside of social norms and are therefore exceptionally violent. In fact, the victim was raped by several men in front of ten or more people who stood by and watched. Such an act seems to beg the question of where the blame should lie, sick individuals, or sick society? And what about the whole host of students who refused to take the photos down from their Facebook pages after the rape occurred?

One could argue the unusual nature of the rape and the use of Facebook contributed to the moral outrage evidenced by police and the print media. As Marian Meyers writes, "only sexual assaults that are deemed unusual are worth reporting. Indeed, the emphasis on the uncommon renders most rapes not simply un-newsworthy, but unimportant."¹⁴⁸ The unusual also corresponds to David Taras's concept of the governing news values, "unusual, conflict, prominence, proximity, et al,"¹⁴⁹ which could also explain why this case was reported so widely in both local and national newspapers. The conflict between

¹⁴⁶ Todd, "Internet gang rape."

¹⁴⁷ Quan, "Girl's friends."

¹⁴⁸ Meyers, *News Coverage*, 93.

¹⁴⁹ David Taras, *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media*. (Broadview Press, 2001).

the police, the victim's parents, the community and her peers could also be the reason why media were so eager to explore the schism between the "was she, or wasn't she" discussion surrounding the victim. But regardless of why the case was reported so widely, the language used when describing the attacks, I argue, served to make visible and invisible the attackers, and perpetuated the myth that rape is aberrant.

Using language that posits the attackers as evil villains is an understandable choice, but one that I believe has damaging discursive consequences. If readers believe that rape is perpetrated by monsters only, then there is no need to worry about the friend, the date, the boyfriend, and the neighbour. When this kind of language is used "it hides the fact that most sexual assaults are perpetrated by friends and acquaintances, or, chillingly enough, by family members."¹⁵⁰ In fact, the Pitt Meadows perpetrators were the victim's peers. The 16-year-old charged with Child Pornography for posting the photos, and the 18-year-old charged with sexual assault were both known to the victim. Several weeks after the crime was initially reported there were rumours that the victim and one of the suspects of rape were seen together at a local McDonald's.¹⁵¹ This was suggested by some of the victim's peers as evidence her story was untrue because she was possibly seen with a suspect, but it also merely may point to the fact that even being seen with a suspect following the attack was seen by some as a tacit admission of the victim's guilt. The perpetrators were part of this girl's community, however, the discursive consequences of positioning the rape and the attackers as sick gives the impression that rape is aberrant and perpetrators are individuals that do not exist and operate within regular society.

¹⁵⁰ Shannon Sampert, "Let Me Tell You a Story: English-Canadian Newspapers and Sexual Assault Myths." *Canadian Journal of Women and Law*, 22.2. (2010), 313.

¹⁵¹ Laura Baziuk, "Boy faces child-porn charge in gang rape." *The Province*. 30 September 2010.

Another consequence of this language is that it serves to deflect attention away from the attackers onto a monolithic entity. If the appalling acts of Pitt Meadows are deflected onto a sick society, then who exactly is to blame for the attack? A focus on this language served to make the perpetrators visible, but as faceless, immoral entities. The result was that in a vacuum of information about the perpetrators, the victim was the one who came into focus. Her character, the veracity of her story and the support, or lack thereof, of her peers became the focus of many of the news stories, rather than her attackers.

Victim Blaming: “She asked for it,” Who Can be Raped and How

The previous chapters discussed the inclusion of rape myths in crime reporting and culture. The myth that women ‘ask for’ rape by the way they dress, their actions, or the company they keep can have policing effects on female behaviour and gives the impression that the victim is at fault, or at least partially responsible for her rape. As written by Jane Doe,

A raped woman is framed socially and within the law as something broken. Neither Madonna nor whore but somewhere in between. The carrier of bad luck. There is a general but grudging acceptance that it isn’t really her fault, but if she had done something else, gone in another direction, not had that drink or worn that dress or smiled that way, it might never have happened.¹⁵²

It is not often that we ask what robbery victims were wearing at the time their purse was snatched, or whether they’d had a few drinks before they chose to walk down that dark street. It is, however, quite common for some to question the motivation and veracity of a rape victim’s testimony; his/her character and past behaviour can become fair game and matter of debate in the press. As discussed in the previous chapter, Marian Meyers has

¹⁵² Jane Doe, The Story of Jane Doe: A Book About Rape. (Toronto: Random House, 2003), 118.

argued that rape myths and media coverage of rape “made (rape) out to be just the way things are, part of the natural order of the universe.”¹⁵³ Though I would point out that the police and the media in the Pitt Meadow’s case did not position this rape as natural, there was minimal effort to find an alternative discourse for the crime outside the victim blame frame that was used in the coverage of the Pitt Meadows rape. Despite the repeated efforts of police and the victim’s father to position her as a good rape victim, that is, one that could not consent because of a suspected drugging, questions of consent and blame played out among her peers, which were then reported by media. The emergence of two dueling Facebook groups “Support for 16yr old victim in Pitt Meadows,” and “Reasonable Doubt in Pitt Meadows,”¹⁵⁴ fueled the narrative that the victim’s rape was an either/or issue with two opposing sides. The “Support,” site contained comments such as “My family is sickened by what happened to this young girl,”¹⁵⁵ while the “Reasonable Doubt” page advocated for “critical thinking and for truth and justice,” for the young men who committed the alleged rape. The debate between the victim’s supporters and police occurred in numerous news stories, across a variety of both local and national print media.

Victim blaming statements, and the debate that erupted over the ‘was she,’ or ‘wasn’t she’ raped, became a main focal point for the majority of stories written about Pitt Meadows. In 26 out of the 43 stories (60 %), the debate and sparring between police, the girl’s father, and her peers, was the focus of the articles. When police discovered the images online, they had trouble getting students to remove the photos, as police reported that some of the girl’s peers believed the rapes to be consensual. Police stated that there

¹⁵³ Meyers, *News Coverage*, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Inwood, “Facebook support.”

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

was some confusion between the girl's peers and the police, and that youth were not getting the message that this was a rape and not sex. "The youth don't seem to understand that this is a rape," Insp. Darren Lench told reporters." There is this thought that somehow it was consensual."¹⁵⁶ In another quote, Lench went even further, "This was a gang rape by several males who took advantage of a female that couldn't consent, was drugged and had no opportunity to defend herself...It was a horrific act."¹⁵⁷

Police also reported that some students posted comments under the rape photos on Facebook, one reading, "C'mon, who's not down for a gang bang,"¹⁵⁸ and another, "If you knew the true story you would find it funny."¹⁵⁹ Due to the lack of cooperation with the removal of photos and videos, Ridge Meadows RCMP held a press conference explaining that the photos depicted a crime, in a move that they hoped would urge students to step forward with information and cease the reposting and sharing of the images and video. "Regardless of what some people believe they are watching, this was a rape,"¹⁶⁰ said Sgt. Hyland. However, despite the concerted efforts of police to position the victim as blameless in the attack, some of her peers posited that the victim was intent on ruining the perpetrators' lives after a consensual sex act went awry.

"She's ruining these other people's lives"

In an article titled "Girl's friends dismiss rape allegations at rave party," in the *National Post*, the validity of the victim's testimony is called into question by some of the victim's peers.

¹⁵⁶ Luymes, "Gang-rape photos."

¹⁵⁷ Bellett, Crawford, Woo, "Photos of teen's rape."

¹⁵⁸ "Gang Rape," *CTV News* online print version .

¹⁵⁹ Luymes, "Gang-rape photos."

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Mariah Schultz, 17, said it was terrible photographs of the incident were posted online...but the police and the media have misinterpreted what took place that night...In her opinion, the embarrassment of seeing the photos plastered all over Facebook prompted the girl to allege assault. 'It makes me angry. She's ruining these other people's lives...' Jeannette St. Germain, 16, who also attended the rave, agreed. 'It's frustrating to us. Police are just listening to what she's saying.'¹⁶¹

Other articles quoted students as stating that "I heard she wanted to do stuff...There's stories everywhere, I don't know what to believe,"¹⁶² and "I don't think she was raped...apparently she was saying stuff."¹⁶³ Schultz's and St. Germain's statements were repeated and reused in a number of the publications that talked about the debate between the police/victim and her peers. Others commented that the victim was on recreational drugs, "I heard she was on Ecstasy,"¹⁶⁴ and that this was somehow indicative of the girl's guilt. Victim blaming sentiments from the girl's peers occurred in more than half of the print articles written about the rape. These statements were almost always presented in opposition to statements of outrage by police and the girl's father. The proliferation of the victim blaming statements gave the impression that the girl's rape, despite assurances from police that it could not be consensual, was a matter of debate. Despite the apparent presence of drugs and alcohol, despite photos and videos that depicted a rape, and despite the fact that there were multiple attackers and witnesses, there was still a narrative of victim blaming that ran through media coverage of the crime.

The statements of doubt from the girl's peers clearly illustrate the type of victim blaming that takes place in cases of sexual violence, even in cases where there is more than one perpetrator. Scholars Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald found media

¹⁶¹ Quan, "Girls' Friends."

¹⁶² "Schools, police," *The Canadian Press*.

¹⁶³ "Gang Rape," *CTV News*.

¹⁶⁴ Quan, "Girl's Friends."

coverage of victim blaming, even in cases of gang rape, in their study of ten major rape cases. Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald did an analysis on the media's attribution of blame in cases of rape and whether blaming statements were directed towards the victims of rape or their attackers. Interestingly and perhaps disturbingly, they found that even in instances of gang rape, victims were condemned for their role in the crime, and that victims who were in some way associated with the rapist were much more likely to be blamed for their rape.¹⁶⁵ As they write, "In 6 of the 10 cases where victims were blamed to varying degrees, all of the victims were friends, co-workers, fellow students, pickups or newly acquainted parties to their attackers... Victim blaming also corresponded to all three cases that involved drinking in bars."¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, they found that

(In) five cases involving gangs of rapists, three were included in the upper half of victim blaming cases. This is to say that despite the existence of multiple rapists, the victims were still those who suffered disproportionate blaming. It is worthy of note that in these three high-level victim blame rapes by gangs of men, victims were drinking. It would appear that victim behavior, such as drinking, is still such a forceful consideration that even the presence of multiple offenders cannot override it in terms of attributing cause, motivation, precipitation and the like to victims in rape offenses.¹⁶⁷

The fact that the victim in Pitt Meadows had been drinking called into question the validity of her rape claims, in the eyes of her peers. Included in their study, Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald list several factors frequently used by media and the audience to assess victim blame. They were: "Was the victim/offender(s) drunk or drinking? What was the victim wearing, e.g.: short skirt? Where did the incident take place, e.g.: bar, alley, and bedroom? Did the victim fight/resist the offender(s)? What is

¹⁶⁵ Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald, "Media attributions of blame," 14.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the victim's sexual history? When did the victim report incident?"¹⁶⁸ The print media's treatment of these factors as having led to the rape and the focus on certain details (ie. that the victim was drinking or on drugs) may have contributed to the victim blaming statements by the girl's peers in print media coverage of Pitt Meadows.

Victim Blame and the Media

As Ericson, Baranek and Chan write in their book Visualizing Deviance, "Journalists bring something to mind by visualizing it. The news brings to mind events in the world through the accounts of journalists and their sources. These accounts visualize what happened, why it happened, what it was like to be involved in the event, what is likely to happen next, what should be done about it, and whether any or all of this is good or bad."¹⁶⁹ Therefore, the media discussion of details that pertain to the victim's dress, whereabouts, relationship to the perpetrators, sexual history, time she reported the incident, can effect how the account of the rape is translated to its audience, or in this case, the girl's peers.

While the victim's clothes were not discussed in any of the print coverage of Pitt Meadows, numerous articles mentioned where the rape occurred. That is, it was reported that the rape occurred "in an isolated rural area- known to police as a party house."¹⁷⁰ It was also repeatedly mentioned that the rape occurred late at night, "during a rave attended by hundreds of youths and adults."¹⁷¹ One news report described the rave as "an all-night party that police say are all too often associated with date rape drugs,"¹⁷² and

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁹ Baranek, Chan and Ericson, Visualizing Deviance, 4.

¹⁷⁰ "Second arrest made in gang rape." *Postmedia News*. 20 September 2010.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² "Gang Rape," *CTV News* online print version.

that the party atmosphere was “chaotic and drug-filled.”¹⁷³ In all but two of the 43 articles written between September 10, and October 10th on the Pitt Meadows rape, the fact that the rape took place at a rave and a place known by police as a party house is mentioned in the first few paragraphs of the piece. These details alone may seem innocuous, but placed within in the paradigm of the ‘she asked for it’ myth, wherein women deserve rape because of their manner and conduct, the details are woven into a fabric of meaning for the audience. News has been said to “rely a great deal on the readers’ presupposed information—including their stereotypical beliefs—to get information across in a quick and concise manner.”¹⁷⁴ By writing that the girl was at a rave, at a party house, plays into the stereotype that only bad girls get raped, i.e., the girls that stay out late partying. The placement of the location of the rape at the beginning of the 41 of the 43 of print articles, (95%) indicates that this fact was deemed an important detail by both police and the media. The unintended consequences of reifying this particular detail is that the location of the rape is giving the reader particular clues on how to read this rape. By prioritizing this information, the existence of the rave becomes essential to the victim’s rape script. If she hadn’t have been at the party, then she would not have been raped. Thus, she failed to protect herself from her rape. While this was most likely not the intention of the print coverage, the outcome of the framing of the rave as “chaotic” and “drug-filled,” is that the victim’s actions are implicated as a contributing factor to her rape.

Mariah Schultz’s, (the victim’s peer), assertion that the girl came forward because of embarrassment or shame also suggests the myth that women regularly lie about rape in

¹⁷³ Luymes, “Gang-rape photos.”

¹⁷⁴ Sampert, “Let me tell you,” 303.

order to avoid judgment for their sexual behaviour or that women cry rape for revenge.¹⁷⁵

As discussed in previous chapters, the cultural positioning and understanding of male and female sexuality has affected how we frame sexual interaction and rape. As Carol Smart writes,

Because women's sexuality is constructed as mysterious and as something that women themselves do not really know, (that is 'frigid' women), while men's sexuality is constructed around the supposedly more straightforward (honest) imperative of erection, penetration, and ejaculation, women are often understood to be guardians of what men most want, but of which they have little understanding...it is within this dominant regime of meaning that law presides over contested accounts of rape and seduction.¹⁷⁶

Therefore, since the victim would be too ashamed to admit she had sex with multiple partners, victim-blaming statements posit that the cry of rape has come to stand for what they deem to be consensual sex. Also at work here is the myth that innocent men are regularly accused of sexual assault.¹⁷⁷ However, in this sense, it is the victim herself who was put on display to be judged by her peers. Due to the lack of information about the perpetrators, news coverage of the rapes focused on the portrayal, (both supportive and unsupportive), of the victim. The conflation of rape with sex by the victim's peers in Pitt Meadows also plays into the hot blooded male myth that posits that in the face of a seductive woman, men are incapable of overcoming their overwhelming biological need for sexual conquest. In this sense, the victim asked for her rape "because she enticed a sex-crazed pervert or that her sexual powers were so overwhelming, she pushed the ordinary male out of control."¹⁷⁸

In addition to the reprinting and reusing of incendiary quotes about the victim's

¹⁷⁵ Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp*, 255.

¹⁷⁶ Smart, "Law's Power," 202.

¹⁷⁷ Sampert, "Let me tell you," 307.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

responsibility for her rapes, the framing of the differing opinions as a debate in which something could be won or lost is problematic. As mentioned in previous chapters the way the media frame a specific event can have an effect on how the reader/audience reacts to the information presented. Framing “defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy,”¹⁷⁹ and “refers to the subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems.”¹⁸⁰ While framing issues as a debate can be useful when trying to invoke a balanced account of an issue or electoral process, to do so with crimes of sexual violence implies that the rape victim’s testimony and evidence is to be regarded with suspicion. For example, one article written about the rape states “local students sparred about whether the drugging and violent assault of the young girls counts as rape,”¹⁸¹ and that “For investigators, there is no debate the girl is a rape victim.”¹⁸² *The Globe and Mail* reported that some students “speculated that the girl was fabricating or exaggerating her story. ‘I hear two sides of the story, so I’m not sure,’ said one Grade 11 male student. ‘She was probably on Ecstasy.’”¹⁸³ Furthermore, when there was a quote from a fellow student or peer that questioned the victim’s innocence there was always a follow up quote from the victim’s father, or police that asserted the victim’s innocence, implying that the victim’s testimony and evidence had to be routinely buttressed by others who would assert her innocence. Once again, the intentions of the print media were most likely not intentionally malicious, and the inclusion of supportive statements seems to indicate an effort to include alternative discourses of victimhood. However, positioning the victim blaming statements as either/or opposite statements

¹⁷⁹ Nelson et al, “Media Framing,” 567.

¹⁸⁰ Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?*, 11.

¹⁸¹ “Schools, police,” *The Canadian Press*.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Mickleburgh and Stueck, “After alleged gang rape.”

indicates that both statements have, and deserve, equal value. Language that posits the debate between students and victim seem to indicate that there are two equal, but differing sides to this issue. I would argue that to present victim blaming statements without the context of rape culture and rape myths, which the vast majority of the articles did not include, is to present these statements as balanced arguments occurring in a vacuum free of rape myths and rape culture.

Drugs and Rape: “She had no opportunity to defend herself”

While the ‘she asked for it’ myth was discussed above in relation to the girl’s peers, another interesting discourse emerged between peers, police, and experts about consent and date rape drugs that played into notions of blame and responsibility. As Estrich discussed in her book Real Rape, rape law and how it was formed was predicated on the notion that resistance and force were paramount to proving a woman’s innocence. She writes, “Rape has been defined so as to require proof of actually physical resistance of the victim, as well as substantial force by the man. Evidentiary rules have been defined to require corroboration of the victim’s account, to penalize women who do not complain promptly, and to ensure the relevance of a woman’s prior history of unchastity.”¹⁸⁴ Though police repeatedly stated that the girl could not consent because of the date rape drug,¹⁸⁵ there were some clues, however subtle, that the lack of resistance from the victim was fuelling doubts about her innocence. One police officer mentioned that the victim was unable to fight back because of the drugs. As The *Vancouver Sun* reported one officer saying “This was a gang rape by several males who took advantage of a female

¹⁸⁴ Estrich, Real Rape, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Andrea Woo, “One arrested after alleged gang rape at rave party.” *Vancouver Sun*. 16 September 2010.

who couldn't consent, was drugged and had no opportunity to defend herself."¹⁸⁶ But what if the victim had not been drugged? Would her rape be any less horrific or undeserving? And despite the insistence by police that she was drugged, how come the victim's apparent consciousness in photos and videos made some doubt her veracity? As one officer said, "the girl was conscious at the time...which might give someone looking at the photographs the impression, wrongly, that she was aware of what was happening."¹⁸⁷ It would appear that despite the repeated claims that the victim could not consent because of drugs, the unintended consequences of this fact gives the impression that the victim, although she could not legally consent, was partially to blame for her rape. The warnings by print media and the police about the danger of date rape drugs, and the direct connection made between drugs and her rape, serve as a warning to women that when they do not protect themselves there may be dire consequences.

In 30 of the 43 articles (70 %) about the victim's rape, it is mentioned that she was drugged prior to her assault. While I agree that this is an important fact to note, the direct correlation between the drug and rape, (it was often mentioned in the same sentence that the victim was drugged then raped), leads to the suggestion that only women who are drugged can be raped, and that the victim could have been more careful and avoided the drug. Placing the emphasis on drugs as one of the main causal factors of her rape situates her ingestion of the drug, however unwittingly, as one of the sole reasons for her rape. As part of the aftermath of the gang rape "assemblies were held at local schools to explain the dangers of date rape drugs."¹⁸⁸ These warnings and cautionary tales by police and

¹⁸⁶ Bellett, Crawford and Woo, "Photos of teen's rape."

¹⁸⁷ "Schools, police," *The Canadian Press*.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

schools, well intentioned that they are, can serve to shift blame onto individual behaviour instead of society at large. As Marian Meyers writes,

News reports informed by police warnings make it clear to women what actions and locations are unsafe, influencing decisions about where to go, what to wear, how to act, how late to stay out. It tells all of us how society views male acts of violence directed at women, delimiting what may be acceptable or unacceptable behaviour for both women and men.¹⁸⁹

Another fact not mentioned, save for one article, is that the presence of date rape drugs in rape cases is relatively low.¹⁹⁰ In fact, in a study of toxicology tests given to 178 people treated for sexual assault at seven Ontario hospitals “there were only two positive findings of GHB and none for Rohypnol, drugs most often cited in date rape public awareness campaigns.”¹⁹¹ Though police personnel have argued that “providing women with warnings gives them the opportunity to protect themselves,”¹⁹² these warnings feed into the notion that women in some way have control over how, when, and if they are raped. And if they can control the cause, then when they fail, and find themselves a victim of rape, then they must take some responsibility for their actions.

However, as Shannon Sampert notes, it is not only police who engage in victim blaming behaviour, parents can sometimes unwittingly involve themselves in victim blaming when proclaiming that they should have better prepared their children for societal dangers.¹⁹³ In an article in the *The Province*, the father of the victim “urged parents to talk to their children about the dangers of attending such events and about

¹⁸⁹ Meyers, *News Coverage*, 67.

¹⁹⁰ Douglas Quan, “Date rape drugs not usually found in sex assault cases, study says.” *Postmedia News*. 30 September 2010.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Interview of Mark Pugash, director of corporate communications, Toronto Police Service (28 October 2004) [in person in Toronto], cited in Shannon Sampert’s, “Let me tell you,” 324.

¹⁹³ Sampert, “Let me tell you,” 326.

booze and drugs.”¹⁹⁴ In another article, in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, he was quoted as saying, “It’s a very dangerous world, well beyond what we thought.”¹⁹⁵ The emphasis on danger and of attending events where there may be alcohol and drugs implies that if parents and children act correctly they will not have to deal with the consequences of rape. Clearly, the victim’s father is distraught and his intention was not to shift blame to his daughter, but the discourses of rape myth and blame serve to shift blame from society and culture to the individual. When emphasis is placed on a victim’s responsibility to manage risk then when rape occurs there is no one left to blame except for the individuals involved, most often the victims. As Sampert writes, “This type of victim blaming, whether by the police, the victim’s family, or the perpetrator, reiterates the myth that it is the (female) victim’s behaviour and not the (male) perpetrator’s that must be controlled.”¹⁹⁶

Technology and the Morally Corruptible Youth

The debate that the print media were so eager to write about between victim and students, played out online, most often on the social networking site Facebook. Facebook had a large role not only in the reporting of the case, but also as a place where opinions, ideas, and impressions about the rape were talked out. Initially, police were alerted to the rapes by parents whose children had seen the pictures and had come home upset by what they had seen.¹⁹⁷ As the *Vancouver Sun* reported, “Police discovered details of the rape only after someone who recognized the victim came in and told officers that images of

¹⁹⁴ Inwood, “Facebook support.”

¹⁹⁵ Quan, “Girl’s Friends.”

¹⁹⁶ Sampert, “Let me tell you,” 327.

¹⁹⁷ Bellett, Crawford, and Woo, “Photos of teen’s rape.”

her being raped were on Facebook.”¹⁹⁸ As print coverage focused on the police struggle to get students to remove the images and videos of the assault, media also focused on the emergence of two Facebook groups: one that showed support for the victim, and one that interrogated the victim’s motives in coming forward to police. One of the groups, called “Support for 16 yr old victim in Pitt Meadows,” was created by Carolyn Anderson, a stranger “who was moved by the terrible story,”¹⁹⁹ and wanted to spread the message that “gang rape is not okay.”²⁰⁰ *Postmedia* reported that Anderson hoped the group would reach 1,000 supporters.²⁰¹ An article that appeared a day later reported on the overwhelming support of the site that had already topped 1,000 users and contained mostly supportive messages for the victim. “My family is sickened by what has happened to this young girl,”²⁰² wrote one poster. “My heart goes out to both her and her family...wish I could hug you sweet girl,”²⁰³ wrote another. However, even in this story of support for the victim, the article once again addresses the doubts held by other students who “said the girl complained of rape only after the photos appeared online.”²⁰⁴ These doubts about the girl’s testimony were perpetuated online in the creation of a rival Facebook group called “Reasonable Doubt in Pitt Meadows.” The *Vancouver Sun* reported that “a small group has created a rival page in defence of the men and boys who have been accused, advocating ‘critical thinking and for truth and justice.’”²⁰⁵ On the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Douglas Quan, Chad Skelton and Lori Culbert, “Gang-rape photos ‘added insult to injury,’ victim’s father says; Family has found some comfort in police approach.” *Postmedia News*. 18 September 2010.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Inwood, “Facebook support.”

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Tiffany Crawford and Andrea Woo, “Facebook page questions facts behind rape; Small group calls for people to suspend judgment until truth behind Sept. 10 incident comes out.” *Vancouver Sun*. 20 September 2010.

“Reasonable Doubt” page, many of the same victim-blaming statements still appeared, alleging that the victim was a “voluntary participant.”²⁰⁶ Though in the end the “Support” page had 7000 members while the “Reasonable Doubt” had roughly 90 members, the sentiments of that page, and the debate surrounding the victim’s innocence appeared in 60 per cent of the articles. The great disparity between the two numbers could be seen as a loose indicator of the kinds of support this crime received among the girl’s peers. Although the “Support” group had many more members, the media coverage chose to focus more on the sparring of the girl’s peers.

To frame the rape as a debate about the girl’s consent gives the sense that the violent rape of a 16-year-old girl is an issue that has two different and equal sides. This is not to say that false rape accusations do not happen, and that it’s not important to show caution when reporting on crimes of sexual violence. But rape myths and normative assumptions about female sexuality can have a habit of creeping into coverage when media use stereotypes and familiar paradigms to discuss rape. Suspicion of the victim and rape blaming statements presented without context can have deleterious consequences for female victims who might already be wary about coming forward about their rape. A media study conducted by Shannon Sampert about the prevalence of rape myths in English-Canadian newspapers found that “the majority of the stories (56.8 percent or 870 stories) published in 2002 in the newspapers under consideration contained at least one sexual assault myth.”²⁰⁷ Sampert also notes that in a 1999 Statistics Canada survey a number of women said that they were “fearful of publicity if they did report,”²⁰⁸ which suggests that the way media frame rape can have an impact on whether or not a rape

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Sampert, “Let me tell you,” 304.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 302.

victim makes the choice to notify police of the assault. If journalists perpetuate rape myths through their reporting, intentionally or not, this may continue to contribute to the shaming and naming of rape victims and will prevent other rape victims from coming forward. As Carol Smart writes, “Women ‘know’ they are to blame for rape...the rape trial also confirms that we already ‘know’ about (hetero) sex, namely that men have uncontrollable urges and natural desires and that woman may only passively consent.”²⁰⁹ If women know they are to blame for their rape, intrinsically because of a hegemonic rape culture, then efforts must be undertaken by media to allow opportunity for alternative discourses and frames to enter our collective consciousness.

The Pitt Meadows gang rape was covered extensively no doubt for its violent and graphic nature, but also for the major role the Internet and social networking sites played in the reporting of the crime, how the crime was investigated, and as a site of backlash toward both the perpetrators and the victim. Technologies, like the rapes themselves, were repeatedly referred to as “morally corrupt and criminal.”²¹⁰ Sgt. Hyland stated, “The very public discussion about this victim and the taking and subsequent sharing of photos depicting this rape is disgusting, morally corrupt and criminal,”²¹¹ and a *Vancouver Sun* article talks about how “new technology, specifically ‘social media’ can so casually unleash a Pandora’s box of evil.”²¹² The article’s author, Douglas Todd, warned that “we are not as a society keeping a lid on the new powers associated with Internet technology and social media, which teens and adults have been so vigorously

²⁰⁹ Smart, “Law’s Power,” 206.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Bellett, Crawford, Woo, “Photos of teen’s rape.”

²¹² Todd, “Internet gang rape.”

embracing.”²¹³ The victim’s father stated that, “youth are so de-sensitized to crime and (Internet) pornography. The naivety of those kids is so sickening,”²¹⁴ while the *Vancouver Sun* reported that “(a) Saturday night gang rape has people shocked about the moral decline of today’s young people.”²¹⁵ The connection between technology and the moral decline of youth evokes the arguments of technological determinism. Technological determinism “seeks to explain social and historical phenomena in terms of one principal or determining factor. It is a doctrine of historical or causal primacy.”²¹⁶ That is, it must be technology that is driving the terrible behaviour of the victim’s peers, not the social surroundings and cultural environment. Essentially, technological deterministic arguments assert that,

Technology in general and communications technologies in particular are the basis of society in the past, present and even the future. They say that technologies such as writing or print or television or the computer 'changed society'. In its most extreme form, the entire form of society is seen as being determined by technology: new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals. At the least a wide range of social and cultural phenomena are seen as shaped by technology. 'Human factors' and social arrangements are seen as secondary.²¹⁷

The use of a technological deterministic discourse and the discussion of technology as a corrupting influence on youth, while not invalid, distracted from a larger focus on rape culture and how social networking was used as a means for backlash and the perpetuation of rape myths. As Scully and Marolla have argued, in cases of rape, “diverting attention away from environmental variables such as culture and social structure ignores evidence

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Quan, “Girl’s friends.”

²¹⁵ Todd, “Internet gang rape.”

²¹⁶ Daniel Chandler, “Technological or Media Determinism.” *The Act of Writing: A Media Theory Approach*. (Aberystwyth, 1995), 2.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 3.

that rape, as well as other forms of violence, is learned behaviour.”²¹⁸ In 31 out of the 43 articles on the Pitt Meadows gang rape (72%), technology was mentioned as a major factor in the dissemination and perpetuation of rape and its backlash. However, rather than a discussion of how the Internet has now become a new forum to disseminate rape myths, focus was placed on the need for education and new policy and warning youth of the horrible dangers of the Internet.

The article by Todd that appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* painted a rather damning indictment of social media and its power to make young people, (who have always been bad), even worse: “Tragically, young people (and old) have done terrible things since human history began... What is tragically different about this horrifying rape is that it reveals how new technology, specifically ‘social media,’ can so casually unleash a Pandora’s box of evil.”²¹⁹ In this sense technology, and our lack of regulation and understanding of its evils, stands in as the bogeyman and villain of the rapes. It is our lack of law and order and our lack of understanding that “technology can have a dark side,”²²⁰ that has led us to this dark place. The emergence of social technology of a new evil that “We have a long way to go to properly regulate,”²²¹ becomes part of what Steven Gorelick has called our “cosmology of fear.”²²² According to Gorelick this “cosmology of fear reformulates continuously as we perceive new threats and try simultaneously to incorporate new information that renders old threats harmless.”²²³ Therefore, the emergence of technology as a morally corrupting influence becomes

²¹⁸ Joseph Marolla and Diana Scully, “Riding the bull at Gilley’s: Convicted rapists describes the rewards of rape.” *Social Problems*. 32.3. (1993), 251.

²¹⁹ Todd, “Internet gang rape.”

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Gorelick, “Cosmology,” 18.

²²³ Ibid.

interwoven into Canadian society and our own cosmologies of fear. Cosmologies of fear can also tell us “what we should regard as safe or dangerous, and so they affect our daily lives in very direct ways.”²²⁴ Therefore as technology emerges as a threat to the fabric of our morality, there will be an increased emphasis on law and order, and the need to regulate our consumption of the Internet.

Indeed, as news broke of the use of Facebook to victimize the victim further, Mike Lombardi, Vancouver school board trustee, “noted the rape and subsequent dueling Facebook support sites highlighted the need for social media education in schools.”²²⁵ Lombardi said the school was now developing an “acceptable use policy for social media,”²²⁶ that would aim at digital literacy and attempt to educate youths on the dos and don’ts of social networking sites. While a discussion of the proper use of social networking sites would not be out of line, the shift of emphasis onto the technology, not the rape itself, served to move the conversation away from rape culture and onto a discussion of Internet literacy.

This type of fearmongering surrounding the immorality of youth and corrupting technology could also constitute what has been called a moral panic. Stan Cohen’s work on the construction of crime suggests that a “condition, episode, person or group of persons, emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.”²²⁷ When this occurs, the media responds with stereotypical news coverage, relying on experts who

²²⁴ Ibid., 19.

²²⁵ Crawford and Woo, “Facebook page.”

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Stan Cohen cited in Jonathan Simon, Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear. (Oxford University Press, 2007) 41-42.

provide policy responses.²²⁸ As Jonathan Simon argues, "policy entrepreneurs have learned not only how to mobilize and amplify moral outrage in order to generate moral panics, but also how to create the conditions that gave rise to it in the first place."²²⁹ Therein, the emergence of social media as evil narrative is designed to mobilize a moral outrage surrounding the corrupting influence of technology on youth. Ruth Klinkhammer and David Taras also note that that coverage of high profile court cases provides society with the opportunity to perform "rituals of degradation and ultimate acts of excommunication."²³⁰ The repetitious use of words such as disgusting, corrupt, sickening and criminal, in the coverage of Pitt Meadows echoes the cathartic need for readers and media to reify technology as the ultimate corrupter and purge its influence by imposing sanctions and judgment. Media rely on the generation of moral panic to feed the frenzy of outrage surrounding technology, while the institutional roots of sexual violence remain uncontested. As Glassner has stated, "fearmongering relies on the narrative technique of 'misdirection.'"²³¹ By focusing on the threat of technology to our moral fabric, the media can misdirect attention to social networking sites, rather than a discussion of rape culture.

Technology was portrayed not only as a blight on our moral fabric, but also in some cases, was discursively placed in the position of perpetrator. The images were said to be "spreading like wildfire,"²³² with the posting and viewing of photos that "continue to victimize the young girl and her family."²³³ The initial rape, horrific enough, was

²²⁸ Robert Froese and Shannon Sampert, "Punks, Firebugs and the Laughing Girl: Youth Crime Coverage in the *Winnipeg Sun*." *Theorizing Criminal Justice*. Kelly Gorkoff and Richard Jochelson eds. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 3.

²²⁹ Simon, *Governing Through Crime*, 43.

²³⁰ Ruth Klinkhammer and David Taras, "Introduction." *Western Broadcasting at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. Leen Haenens and Freida Saecys eds. (Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 579.

²³¹ Barry Glassner, "Narrative Techniques of Fear Mongering." *Social Research*. 71.4 (Winter 2004), 822.

²³² Quan, "Girl's friends."

²³³ Bellett, Crawford, and Woo, "Photos of teen's rape."

perpetuated even further through the online rape of the victim through the continual posting and reposting of the photos. The victim's father told *CTV News* online that the "rape continues because of all the photos and comments on Facebook."²³⁴ In this sense, technology stood in for the role of perpetrator in the absence of any real information about them. The language used when discussing Facebook and technology carried the same condemnation and rhetoric usually reserved for the accused. Not only did the emphasis on moral depravity of technology shift blame away from rape culture and the perpetrators, it discursively situated technology to bear the brunt of outrage for the proliferation of the rape images rather than the individuals themselves. Rape will continue to occur, regardless of whether students posts images of it on their Facebook page. Technology has only broadened the means by which rape victims can receive both harassment and support, and a study of the rape myths and rape culture itself not the means by which it is disseminated would be a more fruitful discussion.

Internet Pornography and Rape

It must be briefly mentioned the role Internet pornography took in the reportage of the gang rape at Pitt Meadows. While the victim's father was repeatedly quoted saying youth had been desensitized to crime and pornography,²³⁵ a few other sources also suggested that the widespread availability of graphic images has had a deleterious effect on youth. Ken Clarkson, chairman of the Pitt Meadows school board, suggested that there should be more discussion between parents and teachers about the sexual content on the Internet and that "Until now the world of sex and pornography was a world that was

²³⁴ "Rave-Gang-Rape-Update." *The Canadian Press*. 17 September 2010.

²³⁵ Quan, 'Girl's friends.'

tough to get access to and now it is so available.”²³⁶ Louisa Russell, a rape crisis worker, also warned that the Internet pornography industry and its pervasive presence on the worldwide Web has made it easier for people to distribute the images of the gang rape.²³⁷ She also stated that, “The porn industry, which is now a \$97-billion-a-year business, has had an impact on all of our lives, including the ease with which men can upload pictures of rape and transfer those images of violence against women.”²³⁸ While some sources, it seemed, would like to place some responsibility on pornography, some scholars have argued that the links between pornography and rape are tenuous at best. A study on Internet rape sites conducted by Jennifer Gossett and Sarah Byrne asserts that, “studies of the effects of pornography toward rape and the actual occurrence of rape have produced inconclusive, and often contradictory results.”²³⁹ However, they also argue “the Internet has posed new questions about the reality, regulation, definition and availability of pornography,”²⁴⁰ and that “concerns about the real-life implications of pornography has often guided researchers to seek causal links between pornography and instances of violence against women.” Though I understand the impulse to connect violence against women with the aggressive and sexual images of pornography, to discuss pornography in relation to Pitt Meadows without also discussing the effect of rape culture is problematic. It is also important to differentiate what type of pornography is deemed harmful, and what is not, which is of course incredibly subjective. To conflate violent behavior and rape with the availability of pornography without a wider discussion of TV, movies,

²³⁶ Crawford and Woo, “Facebook page.”

²³⁷ Kenyon Wallace, “RCMP helpless to stop spread of ‘disgusting’ rape images; Girl’s Attack Online.” *National Post*. 17 September 2010.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Sarah Byrne and Jennifer Gossett, “‘Click Here:’ A Content Analysis of Internet Rape Sites. *Gender and Society*. 16.5. (October 2002), 689.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 691.

music and gender norms that do the same, is another way in which the coverage of Pitt Meadows obscured broader concerns about rape culture and the issue of violence against women. Pornography is only one factor in a multitude of issues that involve sex, dominance and privilege, and stereotypical notions of male and female sexuality. While the discussion of pornography is important, to conflate pornography with men's proclivity to rape only serves to distract from a broader discussion of rape culture and its effects on sexual violence against women.

Alternative Discourses: Alternative Frames for Exploration

As Marian Meyers states,

News reports of women as victims of sexist violence act as both a warning to women and a form of social control that outlines the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and the retribution they can expect for transgressions. The dangers of violating the codes of behaviour are gender specific, positioning all women as vulnerable to male violence and in need of protection.²⁴¹

While an analysis of the coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape indicates that the majority of the coverage fell within the paradigm of victim blaming, there were some attempts by media to engage in alternative discourses of rape. The insertion of counterframes that challenged the status quo and acknowledged the complex culture and problems of rape were piecemeal at best, but they do represent an effort by reporters and newspapers to acknowledge alternative outcomes. While feminist scholars have suggested that "the media is controlled by the dominant elite of powerful white males and is often accessible only to the dominant elite,"²⁴² that does not mean that all news coverage presents a singular view. Michele Martin has argued that the hegemonic viewpoint can counter oppositional ideas by "addressing, incorporating, accommodating,

²⁴¹ Meyers, *News Coverage*, 9.

²⁴² Shannon Sampert, "Bitch on the Bench: Canada's national newspapers and feminist ideology in the 'no-means-no' case." *Masters Thesis*. (Calgary, 2000), 17.

and sometimes even conceding to the viewpoints,”²⁴³ and certainly we have come a long way with a vastly increased number of women in newsrooms, and the emergence of feminism as a legitimate political and cultural force. Some alternative discourses that emerged from media coverage of Pitt Meadows were: language used by the victim’s father that frames the victim as empowered and strong as opposed to weak and powerless, and a discourse and discussion of rape culture that occurred in one article in the *Toronto Star*.

Despite the words used by police that refer to the victim’s rape as “indescribable,”²⁴⁴ “disgusting,”²⁴⁵ and “unimaginable,”²⁴⁶ and the victim as “helpless,”²⁴⁷ the victim’s father attempted to engage the media in a discourse of empowerment and strength about his daughter separate from her portrayal as damaged rape victim. In several interviews with the press he described his daughter as “witty and beautiful and having a strong personality.”²⁴⁸ In a statement distributed by the RCMP, the girl’s father said, “Our daughter is a very beautiful and brave individual...She is strong. She has returned to school and is trying to get some normalcy back in her life.”²⁴⁹ In an interview he conducted outside his home he stated, “She actually emits strength for both her mother and me, seeing how well she is handling this...She’s got tons of support from her friends, and she’s a real strong character, let’s put it that way.”²⁵⁰ The images he conjures of

²⁴³ Michele Martin, *Communication and Mass Media: Culture, Domination and Opposition*. (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1997), 243.

²⁴⁴ Mickleburgh and Stueck, “After alleged gang rape.”

²⁴⁵ “BC-Rave,” *The Canadian Press*.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Quan, “Victim’s peers.”

²⁴⁹ “RCMP call for witnesses in drugging, rape of teen,” *The Canadian Press*, 24 September 2010.

²⁵⁰ Mickleburgh and Stueck, “After alleged gang rape.”

strength and resilience are in opposition to police reports about the “brutal assault,”²⁵¹ and Sgt. Hyland’s assertion that she could “not imagine what this young girl is going through and has to live with,”²⁵² and that the victim was “not doing too well.”²⁵³

Mentioning the support she receives from her friends also opposes the coverage and focus placed on the debate between the girl’s peers about her innocence. The insertion of the father’s voice in media coverage, though minimal, inserts a counter narrative wherein the victim is supported, and strong, rather than alienated and eternally victimized.

Another key counter narrative that emerged was the discussion of rape culture and its implications that occurred in an article in the *Toronto Star*. In an extensive article, journalist Antonia Zerbisias discussed the implications of rape and rape culture in reference to Pitt Meadows. Firstly, Zerbisias includes a definition of rape culture as given by feminist blogger Melissa McEwan. “Rape culture is encouraging sexual male aggression. Rape culture is regarding violence as sexy and sexuality as violent. Rape culture is treating rape as a compliment, as the unbridled passion stirred in a healthy man by a beautiful woman, making it irresistible the urge to rip open her bodice or slam her against a wall, or a wrought-iron fence...”²⁵⁴ Quoting Lise Gotell, a professor at the University of Alberta, Zerbisias explores the notion that “Culture is a terrain that we should take very, very seriously.”²⁵⁵ As Zerbisias briefly lays down the terrain of rape culture: TV shows, magazine ads that depict scenarios of gendered violence, she also directly connects this discussion of rape culture to the events of Pitt Meadows and asks

²⁵¹ Luymes, “Gang-rape photos.”

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Bellett, Crawford and Woo, “Photos of teen’s rape.”

²⁵⁴ Zerbisias, “Are mass media.”

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

the question that no other print media did in their coverage—that is, what is the connection? She writes,

Movies are built around rapes - *The Last House on the Left*, *Deadgirl*, *Descent*—all dwell extensively on the most violent and vile rapes... There are rape jokes. Rape songs. Music videos that convey a sense of sexual entitlement to men while portraying women as insatiable, available... Is it any surprise then that, two weeks ago at a rave in Pitt Meadows, B.C., as many as a dozen young witnesses stood by and watched — and at least one boy videotaped with his Smartphone — what police have described as the "gang rape" of an apparently drugged 16-year-old?... Is this to be expected in a culture that encourages male sexual aggression, against women — or other men?²⁵⁶

Though Zerbisias nuances her take on rape culture by suggesting that aggression, sexual violence, and the reasons by which they occur are not so cut and dry, her discussion surrounding the media, rape education, and sexuality is refreshingly complex. Quoting a variety of sources that offer nuanced messages on rape that acknowledge that rape and rape culture are not simple issues, Zerbisias paints a complicated and multi-layered approach to how rape culture and responses to rape are formed. What is accomplished by Zerbisias's conceptual framework is that the aberrant myth of rape coverage is muted, and placed within a much larger framework of rape culture and the causal factors that may contribute to sexual violence. Through her interviews with various women's studies and sociology professors, Zerbisias paints a more complex portrait of the crime, eschewing rape myths and easy explanations for much tougher questions. Though this type of coverage might not be possible in a proto-typical "hard news" story, it is the type of contextualization and historical background work that Carolyn Byerly has argued is essential to promoting and advancing journalists' and society's opinions of rape.

In order to combat rape myths and the damaging effects they have on rape victims and the portrayal of female sexuality Byerly writes that, "the emergence of a new

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

paradigm in social values on these crimes (rape) demands that responsible journalism take the ethical high ground to incorporate the tenets and substance of feminism in its new values, routines, practices.”²⁵⁷ Through discussion of consent, the media, messages of sexual aggression and rape culture, Zerbisias complicates the straightforward narratives of stereotypical sex crime reporting. There are no villains or singular causes, but a multitude of complex and overlapping factors that contribute to a culture and media that normalizes rape. Zerbisias quotes Lee Lakeman, spokesperson for the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres as saying, “I do think that young men and women get told in many ways that rape is normal, that it happens a lot and there’s no particular reason to fight it.”²⁵⁸

Zerbisias’s take on rape culture was the only piece to mention a culture of rape and violence as a potential casual factor, let alone the only one to mention it in great detail. A study conducted by Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Young on the portrayal of Robert Pickton’s murder trial discusses the difficulty of inserting counterframes into the journalistic process. Pickton was a pig farmer and serial killer who was charged and tried with the murder of six women, along with charges of an additional 20 murders. Many of the women were First Nations and lived in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. Jiwani and Young found that although a “key counterframe emerged during the trial that challenged traditional and stereotypical depictions of the missing women...this counterframe still succumbed to a dominant hegemonic frame.”²⁵⁹ Indeed, the coverage of the gang rape in Pitt Meadows also eventually succumbed to the dominant hegemonic frame of victim

²⁵⁷ Byerly, “Beyond,” 57.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young, “Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse.” *Canadian Journal of Communication*. 31. (2006), 903.

blame and an emphasis on law and order. However, just because this occurred does not mean that, “the option of counterframes emerging through the deployment of socially conscious journalists and reporters to cover the story,”²⁶⁰ is something reporters shouldn’t strive for. As journalists it is important to continue to challenge and question societal norms and structures, despite time constraints and hegemonic narratives that place emphasis on victims and serve to obscure the root causes of sexual violence. In the following conclusion this thesis will revisit the research questions posed in the introduction to the thesis, and address avenues for improvement and further research.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 91 f.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Introduction- Pitt Meadows Gang Rape: A Review

The gang rape of a 16-year-old girl in Pitt Meadows received both local and national attention due to the brutal nature of the assault and the role Facebook and social networking sites played in the discussion and dissemination of the rape and the rape images. A *Factiva* search between September 10 and October 10th, 2010 yielded 43 articles in both local and national print media about the rape. A discourse analysis of these articles and postings on the social networking site Facebook about the rape revealed these findings: the use of rape myths in print coverage such as the ‘she asked for it’ myth; a shift of emphasis on the personal responsibility of the victim rather than her attackers; discourses of technological determination that distracted from discussing the rape as causally related to rape culture; the sourcing of social network postings by print media which overemphasized a discourse of victim blame so that it appeared to be equal with more predominant views; as well as the finding that while alternative discourses did appear in a few articles, there was a minimal effort to provide alternative narratives of victimhood in print news coverage. The one article that did mention rape culture was not able to transcend the hegemonic discourse of victim blame, instead the majority of news coverage reinforced it.

In order to analyze the 43 articles, this thesis used discourse analysis in order to parse out the language of rape culture and rape myths that was occurring in print news coverage. Language and by extension the media can be used to “legitimate control, or otherwise ‘naturalize’ the social order, and especially relations of inequality.”²⁶¹ Having access to the means of discourse (newspapers), according to Van Dijk, is connected to an

²⁶¹ Van Dijk, *News as Discourse*, 254.

access to power. News coverage of rape can either contribute to, or contest stereotypical assumptions of female sexuality and male dominance. Media attention and comments from the victim's peers highlighted the actions and behaviour of the victim, rather than the perpetrators, which played into the 'she asked for it' myth outlined by Helen Benedict²⁶² and Marian Meyers,²⁶³ in the previous chapters.

In Virgin or Vamp, Benedict explains that rape myths can be used to explain away the root causes of sexual violence, thus putting the onus of blame on women and individuals rather than on a sexist society. Benedict says some common rape myths are "the belief that rape is sex, in which the victim 'asks for it' by means of her conduct and dress, and that rapists are lunatics who exist outside of the framework of regular society."²⁶⁴ Benedict also argues that, "looking at rape myths is a way of examining public attitudes towards women, sex and violence and the role the press plays in establishing and reinforcing those attitudes."²⁶⁵ In the case of Pitt Meadows, the actions of the victim prior to the rape, (drinking, attending a party late at night), indicated to some of her peers that she 'asked for' and was to blame for her rape. The print news coverage then reinforced the 'she asked for it' myth by re-reporting the comments posted online without context.

Moreover, the print coverage framed victim blame statements as a debate in which both sides gained equal hearing. Responses from the community: teachers, experts, administrators, gave only limited context to the victim blaming statements and instead focused on the corrupting influence of technology and social networking. The police

²⁶² Benedict, Virgin or Vamp.

²⁶³ Meyers, News Coverage

²⁶⁴ Benedict, Virgin or Vamp, 3.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

maintained that the victim could not consent due to her apparently drugged state, however an emphasis on law and order also fed into the myth that women fail to protect themselves from rape.

Answering the Questions:

At the beginning of my thesis I hoped to answer five research questions by analyzing the news coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape. The questions were:

1. Did victim blame occur in print coverage of and postings about the Pitt Meadows gang rape case?
2. What rape myths were utilized, if any, in the print coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape? How were the victim and perpetrators situated?
3. How did print news coverage and social network postings portray the schism between the victim's peers and police?
4. What role did technology, and Facebook more specifically, play in print coverage of the gang rape; how were they portrayed by media, police, and the community?
5. Were there alternative discourses, i.e., a discussion of rape culture, present in print media of the rape? If so, were they given prominence in coverage?

Answering the questions: Did victim blame occur in the case of the Pitt Meadows gang rape?

Victim blame occurred in comments and coverage about the debate surrounding the victim's culpability and motivation behind the rape charges. An analysis of the 43 articles found that in general, despite comments by police and her father that maintained the sex could not be consensual, her rapes were deemed consensual sex by a minority of her peers. The victim blaming sentiments relied on

rape myths that positioned the victim as untrustworthy and shameful. On the whole, these statements were presented without context on the historical and cultural effects of rape culture and normative gender roles of sexual violence. These victim blaming statements were utilized in the majority of articles, which gave the impression that a large number of the girl's community believed she was to blame for the crime, though her Facebook support group would indicate otherwise. These victim blaming statements fit within the paradigm of rape culture. Rape culture is defined as,

A culture where sexual assault is not only prominent and common, but also tacitly sanctioned through widely promoted attitudes about gender, sexuality, and violence. Rape culture is perpetuated by: misogynistic advertising; entertainment, and other forms of media that sexualize violence; victim-blaming reporting of sexual assault; and the propagation of sexual assault myths.²⁶⁶

The rape myths that were reproduced in news coverage reinforced the paradigm of rape culture in which women 'ask for' their rape by their manner of dress and behaviour. Despite the apparent physical and photographic evidence of the rape, the victim was still seen by some of her peers as complicit and responsible for her rape.

What rape myths were utilized, if any, in the coverage of the Pitt Meadows gang rape? How was the victim situated, how were the perpetrators?

Rape myths that were utilized in Pitt Meadows coverage were: the victim 'asked for it,' by her behaviour, (drinking, being out late at a party, going with the young men supposedly willingly); the myth that rape victims regularly lie about rape for attention or revenge; the myth that rape is aberrant and is perpetuated by individuals that are acting outside the acceptable social stratum; and the myth that rape is sex. Despite the fact that police stated the victim could not legally consent, the treatment of the victim by some of

²⁶⁶ Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth eds, *Transforming*, 142.

her peers indicated that she was to be held responsible for her rapes and that it was only embarrassment and fear of being caught on video that made her come forward. It was regularly stated in news coverage that the rape occurred “in an isolated rural area known to police as a party house,”²⁶⁷ and that hundreds of youth had attended a rave that evening. While this may have been the case, the unintended discursive consequences of repeating that fact over and over meant that blame for the rape was shifted to the victim’s behaviour, rather than her attackers. If she had not been there, drinking, it follows she would not have been raped.

It was also suggested by her peers that the victim lied about the rape in order to protect her reputation. This follows the myth outlined by Benedict that women routinely lie about rape for revenge or to escape social judgment. Therefore, if this rape was not rape, then it was sex. Despite the efforts of police, the rape was deemed by some of the girl’s peers to be consensual. The conflation of rape and sex plays into the hot blooded male myth, in which men are incapable of controlling themselves when confronted with an attractive woman. This ‘hot blooded male’ myth is predicated on gender norms that have historically situated male sexual aggression against constructed female sexual passivity. This myth posits that rape is lust uncontrolled, and male biology is merely taking its just rewards. The manifestation of this myth means that the victim ‘asks for’ her rape “because she enticed a sex-crazed pervert or that her sexual powers were so overwhelming, she pushed the ordinary male out of control.”²⁶⁸ Rape myths perpetuate stereotypes of female passivity and male dominance so that rape is construed as aggressive heterosexual sex gone awry.

²⁶⁷ ‘Second arrest.’ *Postmedia News*.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

In this sense, the 'she asked for it' myth played out in contrast with the 'rapist as crazed' myth. While the victim was portrayed by some of her peers as willing and complicit, others that reacted to the "appalling" and "disgusting,"²⁶⁹ nature of the crime posited that the victim was mere helpless prey to a pack of wild and sexually charged males. These dueling myths work to create the binary of the good girl/bad girl dichotomy, in which the victim was either portrayed as causing her rape, or conversely, helpless against the evil monsters that attacked her. A third narrative that emerged was also that the victim was never raped at all. A large part of the coverage focused on the dialogue between police and students that attempted to define what is and what is not consensual sex. In the Pitt Meadows coverage the contextualization and complicating factors of a rape culture and dominant views of male and female sexuality were on the whole forfeited in order to sensationalize the rapes as beyond the scope of proper society.

Another rape myth that emerged in the coverage is that rape is an aberrant act that is perpetrated by individuals acting outside of social mores. Indeed, gang rape is less common than single perpetrator rape, but rape itself is not a new phenomenon. To routinely use the terms of sick, disgusting, and morally depraved, is to suggest that the attackers were freaks acting outside of 'normal' society. These men are something to be feared, but if women protect themselves properly they won't encounter these individuals. In fact, the victim was raped in front of a group of people by more than one person and some of the individuals were known to the victim. This would indicate that the rape was sanctioned by more than one 'sick' individual. Some of the victim's peers' reactions to the rapes suggest that a dismissive attitude towards sexual violence is not the purview of monsters only.

²⁶⁹ Wallace, "RCMP helpless."

How did the media portray the schism between the victim's peers and police?

The public reaction to the rapes involved the creation of two dueling Facebook groups, where members of the community sounded off on the rapes and gave support or launched their contempt for the victim. The two Facebook groups, one called "Support for 16 yr old girl in Pitt Meadows," and the other "Reasonable Doubt in Pitt Meadows," were often the subject of newspaper reports. These print reports often included the views and thoughts of the girl's peers with minimal if any context or critical commentary.²⁷⁰ Though the number of "likes" a site gets and the number of members it has might not be the best indicator of support, the great disparity between the two numbers (over 7000 group members for the "Support" group and only 90 for the "Reasonable Doubt" group), they can be seen as a loose indicator of the kinds of reactions this crime received among the girl's community. Although the "Support" group had many more members the coverage it received was minimal in the sample reviewed, while negative comments about the victim and the "Reasonable Doubt" group received mentions in roughly half of the 43 articles. The over emphasis on the coverage of disparaging quotes and victim blaming statements may have led readers to believe that the majority of the girl's community blamed her for the incident or did not consider it rape. Judging from the number of Facebook fans for each page, this notion was false.

²⁷⁰ Crawford and Woo, "Facebook page."

The use of the ‘she asked for it’ rape myth following the Pitt Meadows incident, served to obscure the role of the attackers in the crime and shifted the blame from the perpetrators to the victim. Though this may not have been the intention of the journalistic coverage, the unintended consequences of perpetuating rape myths without context meant that coverage focused more on the actions of the victim than the accused.

What role did technology and Facebook play in media coverage of the gang rape, and how did media, police, and the community portray it?

Facebook and the Internet played a major role in the coverage and dissemination of the images of the victim’s rape. Photos of the assault were posted online, police were made aware of the photos, and the ensuing struggle between police to get students to remove the images and the debate about the victim all took place on Facebook and online. Although articles discussed the role that Facebook played in disseminating the videos and photos, none of them (save one article in the *Toronto Star* to be discussed in the next paragraph), took on the challenge of situating the social media use within the context of a rape culture. Instead, the rapes were mentioned as evidence to substantiate the evils of the Internet. As Todd wrote, “while a few laws have been put in place to deal with the Internet’s unparalleled ability to spread pornography...we have a long way to go to properly regulate, and educate ourselves about, this brave new high-tech world.”²⁷¹ While a discussion about the proper uses of technology is no doubt a helpful conversation to have, it is only one element of the discussion of why the victim’s peers spread and shared the photos of her assault online. Such deterministic perspectives take media to task for causing social problems, when it is possible that they merely facilitated the proliferation of photos and videos of a crime. By perpetuating the images and videos of

²⁷¹ Ibid.

the rape online, the victim's peers only served to further victimize the girl and her family. By removing the context of gang rape from the paradigm of rape culture, the evils of social media stand in as a causal factor, instead of merely a tool of crime. The more complicated and unfortunate story is that rape has been going on for longer than Facebook has existed. While social media may have usurped school ground whispers, it cannot be posited that it is a sole contributor to the supposed depravity of today's youth, though in this case it provided ready-made sensational content for reporters.

Technology was positioned as a tool of social evil that served to corrupt youth whom would not otherwise have an outlet for their hurtful words. Technology, in a sense, became the real perpetrator of the rapes. These arguments of technological determinism posited that it was technology, not the culture itself that was behind the disturbing behaviour of some of the victim's peers.

Were there alternative discourses i.e., discussions of rape culture, present in media coverage of the rape; if so, were they given prominence?

Despite the victim blame that occurred in the media, there were some alternative discourses and counterframes that emerged from the print coverage. Most notable was the emergence of the victim's 'voice,' that attempted to discursively situate the victim in a position of power. For example, her father spoke to her strength and support and that she was doing well, which was in direct contrast to the language of the police that indicated the victim would be eternally victimized by the Internet. The father's voice as well as comments from the "Support" Facebook page were two of the few narratives that emerged that spoke about the victim on a personal level without being a statement of blame. Only one article in the *Toronto Star* by Antonia Zerbisias spoke directly about the casual effects of rape culture. The article cited a number of professors, sociologists, and

feminist bloggers who talked about the concept of rape culture and how it serves to fortify male sexual aggression and female passivity. The article posits that culture should be taken seriously, and asserts that violence against women still needs to be addressed by looking at how news coverage, films, music, books, and social policy affect gender relations and sexual relationships. It was the only article to put the rape in a broader context of a culture that implicitly and sometimes explicitly sanctions acts of violence against women.

Though this type of coverage might not be possible in a proto-typical “hard news” story, it is the type of contextualization and historical background work that Byerly says is essential to promoting and advancing journalists’ and the public’s opinions of rape. In order to combat rape myths and the damaging effects they have on rape victims and the portrayal of female sexuality Byerly writes that, “the emergence of a new paradigm in social values on these crimes (rape) demands that responsible journalism take the ethical high ground to incorporate the tenets and substance of feminism in its news values, routines, practices.”²⁷²

Suggestions for further research: The Future of Media Responsibility

In their book Visualizing Deviance, Ericson, Baranek and Chan argue that the media have an important role in defining deviance, crime, and the methods of control. Along with police and government, media have the ability to frame, prime and set the agenda on a whole host of issues, one of them being the issue of sexual violence. News media can be the stage on which discourses of morality, shame, retribution and revenge are played out on a grand scale. News media indicates to their audience and themselves the parameters of proper moral citizenship. However, as Ericson, Baranek and Chan argue,

²⁷² Byerly, “Beyond,” 57.

that privilege is not equal. They write, “The ability to stretch and to contract the moral territory are not equal. Morality is bound up with power so that there is structured inequality in who has a say in the definition and control of deviance. There is a ‘hierarchy of credibility’ establishing who is authorized to say something is good or bad.”²⁷³ If we agree that the media, and by extension newspapers, have the power to influence, reflect and shape opinion, then the question remains, what is the media’s responsibility when covering crimes of sexual violence? And what are some avenues for further research?

Decisions made when covering stories for print media come with the pressure of deadlines, spacing needs, and editorial influence. Cuts to newsroom resources and concentration of media ownership and convergence can no doubt leave the feeling that inserting alternative discourses into stories of sexual violence may not be the number one priority for most newspapers. However, the media do have a responsibility for not only reflecting the views of its audience and society, but also providing those views and opinions with context and clarity. A recent backlash against the *New York Times* for its coverage of the gang rape of an 11-year-old girl²⁷⁴ reveals that there can be and are, consequences for media reports that fall prey to rape myths. Clearly, the young age of the victim had a hand in reader outrage, but this particular case of backlash indicates the need for media outlets, even those as distinguished as the *Times*, to remain vigilant when covering crimes of rape. The fact that rape culture and rape myths exist is not something that should be hidden from view, but instead explored and examined. To reproduce rape myths that place blame on the victim’s individual responsibility rather than her attackers, serves to obscure the social and cultural roots of rape and a rape culture. The views of

²⁷³ Baranek, Chan and Ericson. *Visualizing Deviance*, 7.

²⁷⁴ Brisbane, “Gang Rape Story.”

the victim's peers should not be ignored or unreported; they are valid in that some people still believe women should be held responsible for their assaults. To ignore that rape myths are still present in news coverage would be just as irresponsible as blindly reporting rape myths voiced by the victim's peers. However, it is the way these views are framed, how they are given context, and how they are valued that becomes the issue. As we saw with the *Times* story, refraining from blaming the victim is not enough. To be silent on victim blaming statements means that news media is unwittingly complicit in perpetuating damaging rape myths.

As for avenues of further research, it would be interesting to note what news organizations offer mentorship and training on covering crime and rape and whether this has an effect on the stories those reporters write. As a young journalist I did not receive much training on covering violent crime, least of all rape. I do not believe rape myths are perpetuated along gender lines but rather by a lack of understanding of the history and context behind famous sexual assault rulings like the Ewanchuk case, and what this has meant for the coverage of rape crime.

An analysis of the Cleveland, Texas gang rape, and the public backlash in the *New York Times* would also be interesting to compare to other major gang rape cases i.e., the 'Big Dan' rape case. The 'Big Dan' rape case involved the gang rape of a 21-year-old New Bedford woman by a group of men. The rape occurred at the 'Big Dan' tavern, and no one at the bar that night intervened to stop the rape. The case gained notoriety for the intense cross-examination of the rape victim, and also for the racial tensions that emerged between the Portuguese-American community and other ethnic minorities in the community. How did the New Bedford community react then, how did the Cleveland,

Texas community react years later? Both cases have evidence of racial tension and victim blaming narratives. Has the use of victim blaming in news reporting changed? And if so, how? The analysis of the Pitt Meadows gang rape reveals that rape myths still exist in news coverage of crimes of sexual violence. The emergence of social media and Facebook have opened up new avenues by which rape victims can be harassed and re-victimized by their peers. By publishing victim blaming statements without context, media are complicit in suggesting that women want or ask to be raped.

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