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**Sexual Violence in the Media: An Analysis of Media Coverage on Sexual Violence at South African Universities**

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Word Count

Abstract: 212

Main Body: 9992

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### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following people:

To my supervisors Floretta Boonzaier and Shose Kessi, for your unwavering patience and support. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise with me and for always being there to encourage me through even the most difficult times. I deeply admire you both and so being able to work under your supervision has been a great honour. Your wisdom and guidance has been incredible and I truly appreciate all of your assistance throughout this project.

I would also like to thank my family and close friends for your unbelievable support.

Finally, thank you to my parents for your amazing emotional support as well as your financial support.

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### **Abstract**

South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world and yet there is a fairly limited amount of research within this field. Most research focuses on sexual violence as it relates to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. In addition, there is a lack of understanding of occurrences of sexual violence in institutions such as universities and how such violence is portrayed in the media. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the role of the media in representing sexual violence in South African universities. A media analysis of sexual violence in South Africa's higher education institutions was conducted between the years 2011 and 2016. In order to analyse the content, a thematic narrative analysis was used, located within an intersectional feminist theoretical framework. The analysis yielded three narrative themes: 1) narratives on students' views and experiences of sexual violence on campus, 2) narratives on institutional responses to sexual violence and 3) narratives on the myth of rape culture. The study finds that the media is a non-neutral platform which plays an important role in informing and creating representations around issues such as sexual violence. It also finds that there is a lack of engagement with the identities of the bodies of those affected by sexual violence.

*Keywords:* sexual violence; media analysis; intersectional; thematic narrative; South African universities

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### **Introduction**

Sexual violence is an on-going global problem for women and it has many negative consequences for their mental and physical health (Krug, Dalhberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). In South Africa there is an ever increasing challenge of sexual violence as the country is rated as having one of the highest levels of sexual violence, most of which takes place against young women (du Toit, 2014; Posel, 2005; Sabina & Ho, 2014). Additionally, institutions of higher education, through the institutional cultures that they perpetuate, may play a role in either sanctioning or challenging sexual violence. (Valls, Puigvert, Melgar, Garcia-Yeste, 2016). Thus, it is important for there to be a critical analysis of such institutions.

Additionally, the media is a strong powerhouse in the way information is circulated to society (Los & Chamard, 1997). Consequently, the role of the media in how issues like sexual violence are represented needs to be investigated. This is because such sources of knowledge have a strong foothold in the way people are able to learn, develop beliefs and thus behave around issues like sexual violence (Los & Chamard, 1997). Thus, it is important for there to be a critical analysis of the reporting of media on sexual violence particularly in higher education institutions. This analysis will enable a greater body of knowledge towards understanding how platforms like the media are able to influence certain societal climates of understanding on topics like sexual violence in universities. Furthermore these understandings can either serve to deconstruct or perpetuate societal power structures (du Toit, 2014; Gross, Winslett, Roberts & Gohm, 2006; Los & Chamard, 1997; O'Hara, 2012)

### **Thematic Areas of Research on Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence is defined as any form of sexual advance made by one person to another that is not consensual (Gross et al., 2006; Krug et al., 2002). It consists of any acts such as unwanted sexual comments, sexual advances and unwanted touching. It also includes rape and coercion whether it is physical or psychological coercion, as well as coercive intimidation (Krug et al., 2002; Gross et al., 2006). This is the definition of sexual violence that will be used within this study.

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There is a vast body of research in western countries such as the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) on sexual violence in higher education institutions focusing on a range of thematic areas. One such area considers the issue from the perspective of the perpetrators of sexual violence (O'Toole et al., 2015). This research is often aimed at unpacking the causes of sexual violence (du Toit, 2014). For example, it has been found that risk factors for perpetrating sexual violence result from individual factors like early exposure to violence in the home, antisocial personalities, drinking alcohol and drug consumption (du Toit, 2014; Gross et al., 2006). Additionally, some research found that the perpetration of sexual violence against women, particularly in universities, may result from interpersonal socializations like the hyper-masculinization of men in fraternities (Fineran, Bennett & Sacco, 2003; O'Toole et al., 2015; Valls et al., 2016). It is in fraternities that traditional masculinities are re-enforced, and where sexual aggression is virtually permitted or tacitly encouraged (Fineran, et al., 2003; O'Toole et al., 2015; Valls et al., 2016). Thus sexual violence occurs because women are viewed as conquests where men must use aggression to establish power in order to be perceived as truly masculine within these fraternities (Fineran et al., 2003; O'Toole et al., 2015; Valls et al., 2016). This coincides with the findings that sexual violence is due, in part to the patriarchal structures within institutions that normalize the subjugation of women (Valls et al., 2016). Thus, there is a common explanation that the perpetration of sexual violence comes not just from students enacting power, but from university staff and academics as well who use their positions to receive sexual favours from students in exchange for higher marks. (Gross et al., 2006; Martin & Hummer, 1989; O'Toole et al., 2015; Valls et al., 2016). This research is important as it draws potential similarities to the South African contexts where male residences have similar socialisations (Gqola, 2015)

In addition to looking at perpetrations of violence in universities, research in these western countries have also examined the demographics of survivors of sexual violence in higher education settings (Gross et al., 2006; O'Toole et al., 2015; Valls et al., 2016). These demographics include socio-economic status (SES), age, sexuality and race. This body of work has explored the situations under which incidences of sexual violence occur. This has helped to identify the types of unwanted sexual advances that appear to happen most frequently and to

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whom (Gross et al., 2006; Swarr, 2012). For example, one study indicated that race, ethnicity and SES, were linked to the occurrences of sexual violence within the university, with black women with low SES experiencing the most sexual violence (Gross et al., 2006; Lottes & Weinberg, 1997). Such studies conducted highlighted the intersecting identities of marginalised individuals who experience sexual violence. However they did not explain why and how black women of lower SES may be more vulnerable.

Within the South African context, there is a comparably smaller body of research that looks at sexual violence in universities (Braine, Bless & Fox, 1995; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). This body of research explores the ongoing issue of rape in South Africa. It identifies the risk factors of those who experience sexual violence, such as early sexual encounters and dating, particularly in relation to high-school students (Fineran et al., 2003). Furthermore, if there is research that engages with sexual violence its focus is often directed at its implications on HIV/AIDS (du Toit, 2014; Gross et al., 2006; Valls et al., 2016).

However, this is not to suggest that there is no research that has been conducted in South African universities. Most of the research in higher education institutions has focused on gender-based violence as it relates to society at large (Gordon & Collins 2013). One study used surveys to investigate how students perceive sexual harassment. An interesting finding from this study suggested that there is a multitude of understandings of what sexual harassment means and what it encompasses (Braine et al., 1995). Additionally it illustrated that there is a gender difference in perceptions of reactions to sexual harassment with 37% of the men thinking that victims don't react to being sexually harassed compared to 28% of the women. Additionally, there was a gender difference in perceptions of the seriousness of the issue of sexual harassment, with 79% of the women calling for expulsion as a punishment for perpetrators of sexual violence compared to 68% of men (Braine et al., 1995). These findings point to the gendered nature of sexual violence with women feeling more in danger of being sexually harassed (Braine et al., 1995).

Another study in line with these gendered imbalances was conducted in South African universities to investigate how women in university residences understand and experience gender-based violence (Gordon & Collins, 2013). This study illustrated the way in which women



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have become accustomed to fear and monitoring their actions (Gordon & Collins, 2013).

Through participants' explanations, it showed that women construct gender-based violence as unavoidable with their lives consisting of rules that must be adhered to in order to minimise experiencing such violence (Gordon & Collins, 2013). The women in the study explained that behaviours such as drinking with men or dressing a certain way put women in positions to be sexually harassed in some way (Gordon & Collins, 2013). Thus, this study drew attention to the issue of victim-blaming, illustrating its prevalence in women's encounters of sexual harassment (Gordon & Collins, 2013).

Finally, research that investigates the role of the media in South Africa has, to date, largely focused on intimate partner violence and sexual violence in the more general societal context (Isaac, 2016). These studies correlate with studies on sexual violence as they all engage with the concerns of violence, hegemonic masculinities and institutionalized patriarchal ideologies (Isaacs, 2016). However, none of this research has had a focus on the media and violence as it relates to South Africa's universities.

Predominate forms of media analysis have showcased the role the media has in portraying specific representations of intimate partner violence (Isaacs, 2016). One such study highlighted the role the media has in constructing a representation of intimate partner violence as consisting of only dangerous physical violence (Isaacs, 2016). How the media reports on gender-based violence is important because it may influence the societal imaginations of what violence can look like. Thus it can affect behaviours of perpetrators, victims and potential support structures of victims, validating only certain experiences of violence while minimising others (Isaacs, 2016).

Thus, while some research exists on young people's experiences of sexual violence in South African universities, and while other research exists on the role of the media in representations of intimate partner violence, there is little research done with regards to the role the media has on the narrative of sexual violence particularly on South African university campuses. As such, the exploration of the media on higher education institutions is of particular concern as there is little research done on how sexual violence in South African universities is

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presented to society. Furthermore higher education institutions are often perceived as ivory towers devoid of the injustices and marginalizing structures that exist in society at large (O'Toole et al., 2015). Thus a media analysis with this particular context would work to further understand firstly, how sexual violence is portrayed to the greater society, secondly, how these understandings facilitate a certain narrative around sexual violence both within the institution and the larger society, and thirdly, how the representations formulated by the media serves to further perpetuate or dismantle the notion of universities as different from the rest of society.

In addition to bridging a gap in research between sexual violence at universities and the role of media on society, the past few years in South Africa has seen a surge in student protests in universities. These protests relate to students' experiences of sexual violence and universities' administrative responses to these experiences. The protests have resulted in a large amount of media attention to these universities and so it would be of great interest to investigate the media narratives in relation to the interconnection between the universities, the students and sexual violence. Thus, the proposed research works to increase the body of knowledge on the media's role in representing sexual violence in South African institutions.

### **Aims**

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of the media in understanding sexual violence in South African universities.

### **Research Question**

What media narratives can be identified in the reporting of sexual violence at South African universities?

#### ***Sub-questions:***

- How is the occurrence of sexual violence accounted for in media narratives on sexual violence at universities?
- How are institutional responses accounted for in media narratives of sexual violence at universities?

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- How does the media portray the students' experiences of sexual violence at universities in South Africa?

### **Theoretical framework**

This study uses feminist theory, specifically intersectionality as its theoretical framework. Intersectionality is used to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies that serve to marginalise certain bodies (Collins, 1990). Intersectionality theory is concerned with trying to dismantle oppressive patriarchal institutions in order to establish equality and social justice. Additionally it highlights how feminist concerns of social justice should include not only gender but race, class and other social identities (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013).

The term intersectionality was first coined by Crenshaw (1991) and it works to explain that there are a multiplicity of social identities that should be taken into consideration when accounting for social injustices. Each person encompasses certain identities which hold a certain standpoint within broader society (Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, certain people find themselves with identities which have been historically marginalised such as being black, being a woman and coming from a poor background. Crenshaw (1991) explains that these oppressed identities are interconnected in how they impact an individual's life. Therefore, each person, with an interconnectivity of different identities has different lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). Intersectionality highlights the importance of relating individual experiences of oppression from having specific social identities to the systemic structures that create and perpetuate these oppressions on an interpersonal and societal level (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005).

Following from this understanding, it is evident that feminist intersectionality is an important framework to use in this study as it works to deconstruct patriarchal structures that underlie acts of sexual violence. It also works to validate and give a platform to marginalised experiences (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). In relation to this study, South Africa is made up of a complex demographic of people, of which identities such as race, gender and class have been characteristics for "othering". This means that, based on historical complexities, poor black women's bodies are still invisible and thus their stories are not always heard (Crenshaw, 1991).

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Thus having an intersectional framework means that the analysis of articles from the media can be deconstructed through this lens which engages with how the media narratives make light of differing social identities and their experiences of sexual violence. Similarly, this theoretical framework will help to investigate whether these articles work with or against patriarchal ideologies.

### **Methods**

#### **Research design**

In order for a depth of engagement with media stories on sexual violence at South African universities, this study will make use of qualitative research (Terre-Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). This form of research is able to work in line with feminist intersectional theory to engage with the personal and societal meaning of sexual violence on university campuses (Berg, Lune & Lune, 2004; Sixsmith & Daniels, 2011). Additionally, unlike traditional positivist research designs, qualitative research allows for a discussion of the implications that articles written in the media have on how they create, perpetuate or dismantle identities and constructs of sexual violence and of the people affected by such violence (Berg et al., 2004; Sixsmith & Daniels, 2011). Once again, this is in line with the nature of feminist thought which seeks to identify and critique certain narratives generated by society (Sixsmith & Daniels, 2011). Within this study, engaging in qualitative research enables an investigation on how sexual violence in universities is reported by bodies outside of the university. Additionally, this method of research allows for an investigation on information that was not necessarily anticipated by the researcher (Sixsmith & Daniels, 2011; Terre-Blanche et al., 2006).

More specifically, the qualitative method used will be Narrative Research. Narrative Research explains that we conceptualise the world through the telling of stories or narratives (Murray 2003). Thus, identities are created and interpreted through the stories that people choose to tell, as well as the stories people decide not to share (Murray, 2003). Narrative analysis falls under a social constructionist view. This means that the words people choose and the narratives they tell are fluid versions of the truth based on their own experiences and the ways in which they engage with and make sense of their world (Murray, 2003). Narrative analysis is important

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because it recognizes that stories are not neutral, instead they hold the capacity to do things (Murray, 2003). This method of research is most appropriate for this study as the questions asked in the research question concern the kinds of narratives and their meanings contained in media reporting on sexual violence at South African universities.

### **Sampling**

This media analysis limited its pool of resources to articles that were available on the South African Media electronic database, facilitated by the Sabinet Reference database. This method enabled access to a large number of different national newspapers. It also meant that a large body of information from different sources and different demographic reading pools within South Africa could be collected and collated. As the database is very large and there is a multiplicity of information available on the topic, the articles selected were limited to a time frame from 1 January 2011- 31 October 2016. This was in order to engage with the most current information available. In addition to there being a large database, there has been a resurgence in focus on sexual violence as a result of the student protests at the various universities. Consequently, this time period was used as it would include the more recent media coverage on the issue. A purposive sampling method was used to collect data from the different newspapers. Various keywords relating to sexual violence at universities were entered into the database such as “sexual harassment on campus”, “sexual violence on campus”, “sexual violence at university” and “sexual violence/sexual harassment + university”. These keywords led to various results and the appropriate ones were selected. In the end the sample consisted of 70 articles written in English. The predominant newspapers were: “The Dispatch”, “The New Age”, “Mail & Guardian” and “The Times”.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The electronic South African Media database was accessed for 2 months (October 2016 - December 2016). Close attention was paid to articles written during periods of student protests around rape and rape culture such as the #RURelenceList as this would draw attention from a wide range of different newspapers (Isaac, 2016). Additionally, articles with specific titles relating to sexual violence and the name of a university were considered appropriate. However,

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opinion pieces and editorials were excluded from the analysis as the purpose here was to investigate how sexual violence is reported.

### **Data analysis**

Given that the primary research question posed asks about circulating media stories on sexual violence at universities, narrative analysis was deemed the most suitable method of analysis. A narrative analysis is appropriate for a media analysis because the articles make use of stories that are told by the interviewees in the articles or by the authors of the articles (Murray, 2003; Wang & Burris, 1997). Through the specific use of Riessman's (1993) formulation of thematic narrative analysis, there was an awareness to the type and way that different articles tell different stories. Additionally there was an awareness of how the telling of these stories create certain identities indicative of the views of the society, as well as the subject matter (Murray, 2003). In addition, I highlighted the themes that came across in the telling of stories in order to highlight key concepts and what they mean in relation to the societal understanding of sexual violence (Riessman, 1993). Thematic narrative analysis was also appropriate for this study as it takes into account the story in its entirety. This ensures that the articles and their subject matter are not taken out of context and interpreted in ways that would only benefit the researcher (Murray, 2003). Additionally, this form of analysis allows for an investigation of the representations of sexual violence in higher education institutions whilst engaging in the macro-level realizations and modes of identification of this problem (Murray, 2003).

### **Reflexivity**

Reflection is an important component of qualitative research (Dowling, 2006). It ensures that the researcher constantly locates themselves as a non-neutral entity within the process of their research (Dowling, 2006). Through my social identity as a black women in South Africa, I have a particular engagement with intersectional feminist theory as it relates to social identities which include my own. Thus, my analysis of the data may have been restricted due to my viewpoint on issues concerning marginalised social identities and their intersection with sexual violence. Additionally, my positionality as a student within one of the universities mentioned in this research, means that I have a certain experience and viewpoint of the concern of sexual violence in universities. Thus, I had to continually reflect on how my experiences as a student

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influenced my ideas of what I thought the media would report. This would have limited my ability to neutrally analyse the articles during data collection and data analysis (Dowling, 2006).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Due to the nature of the research, ethical clearance was not required for this study as no participants took part. Additionally, the information that was used for this study came from resources that are openly available to the public and thus no permission was needed in order to gain access to the information used (Isaacs, 2016).

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### Results and Discussion

Three major themes emerged from my reading and analysis of media reports on sexual violence, namely: Narratives on students' views and experiences of sexual violence on campus, Narratives on institutional responses to sexual violence and Narratives on the myth of rape culture.

#### Narratives on Students' Views and Experiences of Sexual Violence on Campus

This first theme focuses on how the media portrays the students' experiences of sexual violence at their universities.

**Protests: The response to the institution.** The first sub-theme within this narrative relates to the university protests. The articles relay that one of the ways in which students felt that their experiences of sexual violence on campus would be recognised is through protests. This sub-theme served as a means through which the students could collectively express their concerns to the management of their institutions with regards to how they feel the universities respond to sexual violence. The following extract shows the experiences of the students around sexual violence even when protesting:

*Protest against horror of sexual violence. It was an eerie, hushed and sombre day at Rhodes University on Friday when about 20% of the student population donned purple T-shirts, taped their mouths shut and spent the day demonstrating against the horror of sexual violence in South Africa...*

*Several unpleasant incidents marred an otherwise potent protest... A man had grabbed the breast of one rape survivor and told her: "If you can survive it once you can survive it again."*

*In another incident, a man had whispered into the ear of a protester with gaffer tape across her mouth that if he chose to rape her she would not be able to scream." (Published in the Daily Dispatch on 26 March 2012)*

The extract above illustrates the violent and patriarchal environment that victims are subjected to. It highlights the discourse of fear of students, the trauma of victims and the entitlement and



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power of the perpetrators. This extract is also poignant in that it illustrates the lack of threat, and the hegemonic masculinities that carry the perpetrators of sexual violence within these institutions. These men were able to harass these women in the middle of protesting against that exact behaviour without any fear of negative repercussions.

Similarly, the extracts below represent the nature of the protests and their intention relating to how the student's feel the universities are handling the issue of sexual violence on campus.

*Anger over UCT's 'attitude' to rape. "If I was a bus or a painting, maybe UCT management would care about me."*

*This was the sentiment of UCT students who gathered at Bremner Building yesterday to express their anger at vice-chancellor Dr Max Price over the way the university handled incidents of sexual violence. (Published in the Cape Argus on 12 May 2016)*

This relaying of student's concerns from the protests is important as it gives them a platform to be referenced outside of what the institution's viewpoints and actions are. Additionally, it gives a more direct encounter with the media as opposed to the universities speaking on behalf of the student's. In so doing, it helps to provide a varied representation to its audience members about students' experiences. It simultaneously provides a different viewpoint to understand the severity of the issue of sexual violence outside of the universities perspectives of what is being done to control it. This reporting of students also works to personalize the issue of sexual violence and it provides insight into how the students who are victims of sexual violence, are actively and continuously affected. In this way, the narrative reporting style of this theme, works to re-sensitise the impact of sexual violence beyond the victims. Furthermore, the impact of this sub-theme, works to counteract the silencing of victims and of the issue of sexual violence.

However it is arguable that one of the reasons behind the view of higher education institutions as ivory towers without any problems like sexual violence and rape culture, is the silencing of these issues which can be fuelled by media reporting (Gross et al., 2006; Isaacs, 2016; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). The examples above show that the reporting of sexual violence in institutions by the media is, in this instance because of the protests. In cases where

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sexual violence occurs outside of protest, the media may contribute towards the silencing of sexual violence through its lack of reporting during the more ‘quiet’ times. For example when reports are given on sexual violence, the articles are very short containing minimal detail of the victims and the ongoing action to convict the perpetrator. This constructs sexual violence as an issue consisting of small isolated incidences. With regards to university based examples, there is minimal reporting on cases of sexual violence with students when there are no protests or lecturers involved. Furthermore in the cases where lecturers are involved, the articles are more about the lecturer and their suspension or career than about getting the victim’s narrative across. The following extract illustrates this:

***Wits fires staffers guilty in sex probe.** Wits University has fired two staffers after an investigation found them guilty of sexual harassment.*

*The two- former senior drama lecturer Tsepo wa Mamatu and former media studies senior lecturer Last Moyo- were among four staff members probed in an independent investigation established by the university following allegations of sexual harassment by students.*

*Wa Mamatu was placed on leave in March after allegations of rape and sexual abuse were levelled against him. (Published in the Star on 1 August 2013)*

The article from the extract above does not make mention of any of the victims from these lecturers. Once again, this silences victims of sexual violence. It also creates a particular representation to readers about the conditions in which sexual violence in universities occurs.

In addition to silencing, there are narratives constructed around the concerns for integrity by the universities. This may account for why so few articles are written about occurrences of sexual violence at universities and thus why universities are constructed to be ivory towers. The following extracts work to illustrate the ways management silencing can take place in order to protect the university's interests and reputation and thus silence the students’ experiences.

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*Varsity acts on 'sex-for-marks' lecturers. ...We view harassment of any sort as unacceptable and the integrity of WSU is important. (Published in the Daily Dispatch on 26 October 2011)*

***More sex claims emerge: Other major universities reveal similar cases to that of the Wits University scandal.** ...The University of Cape Town refused to divulge details relating to sexual harassment on campus. "Cases involving disciplinary action by the university are confidential and are not discussed with the media," spokesperson Patricia Lucas said. (Published in The New Age on 13 March 2013)*

These articles draw attention to why students use protesting as a means of vocalising their experiences. Additionally, this sub-theme illustrates the ways in which the media is able to represent students' experiences, while simultaneously illustrating the ways in which it continues to silence their experiences.

**Perpetrator protection.** The second sub-theme relates largely to one of the reasons why protests against sexual violence took place in the first instance. One of the main discourses raised by the students and their experiences is the narrative that the environment and policies of the universities, allow the perpetrators to stay protected. The following extracts illustrate this:

***No to campus sex pests.** ...For months survivors have been sharing their harrowing experiences on several media platforms.*

*Last month a woman wrote on the collective's blog about having been harassed for two years as a student. When she returned to the university as a lecturer she was terrified to see [her stalker] "swaggering across Jammie Plaza after all these years later".*

*(Published in The Times on 14 March 2016)*

***'Campus rape plans favour perpetrators: Survivors of sexual violence are unhappy with universities' policies and actions, and researchers say under-reporting is part of the problem.** Universities' policies and handling of rape and gender-based violence have created safe havens for perpetrators, say survivors on campuses. (Published in the Mail & Guardian on 29 April 2016)*

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These extracts are important as they demonstrate the various ways in which protection can be understood. They narrate that there are policies and structures that exist, however based on the reports of various students, these policies work in such a way that perpetrators of sexual violence are able to continue with their studies and careers. The stories told are those of victims who, after years, or after leaving and coming back to their universities, find that the people who sexually assaulted them are still there and that despite their offences, nothing has been done. This narrative constructs the idea that there are no consequences to sexual violence. This may account for the low percentage in reporting occurrences of sexual violence to authorities (Braine et al., 1995; O'Toole et al., 2015). Gqola (2015) notes that a lack of social consequence to acts of sexual violence means that people become desensitized to the nature of its destruction whilst simultaneously allowing it continue as there is no threat to the safety of the perpetrators. For example, the reporting of professors who are perpetrators of sexual violence who are then able to go into "early retirement" creates a certain representation about what happens to perpetrators of sexual violence. The media's reports of lecturers who resign or of students who are unsupported by administration to take action against their perpetrators creates the narrative that campuses "favour perpetrators".

A final example that narrates the lack of consequence for perpetrators of sexual violence relates to the firing of a lecturer at WSU who was sexually harassing students. This professor was fired, only to be rehired a few years later by the very same institution. The following article narrates this story:

***Probe into re-hiring of 'sex-for-marks' lecturer.** Walter Sisulu University launched an internal probe into the re-employment of a lecturer fired for having solicited sex with a student for marks three years ago. (Published in the Daily Dispatch on 12 April 2011)*

The above extract illustrates that although his re-employment went under investigation, the severe nature of sexual violence as a violation of people's bodies, even in higher education can be overlooked. The fact that this professor was rehired illustrates the narrative given by the students' stories that there are barely consequences for perpetrators actions (Gqola, 2015).

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However, in only having examples of the lecturers, there is no insight into what happens to the student perpetrators of sexual violence. With the victims being able to share their experiences in the media, it comes to light that the perpetrators of sexual violence are able to continue with their studies, while their victims are left in varying traumatised states which can affect their ability to finish off their degrees. The following extract demonstrates this:

*Varsity Rape crisis. "He was someone I had to see on campus almost everyday," she told City Press in an interview this week.*

*"I would see him and remember his hands around my throat, the bruises left on my shoulders, and the tears in the shower afterwards when I couldn't scrub away my feelings of defilement. I had to see him interact, date and hook up with other women. I tried warning them but with no university backing, how could my words hold any weight?"*

*When she tried to report what happened to her, she was advised to drop it. (Published in the City Press on 24 April 2016)*

Finally, perpetrator protection also highlights the nature of stigma within the discourse of sexual violence. As opposed to the perpetrators of sexual violence being called-out, punished and being the ones who are stigmatised for the obtrusive nature of their actions, the victims of sexual violence are the ones who experience stigma (Gqola, 2015; Valls et al., 2016). The nature of rape culture portrayed in the articles above about university campuses is such that victims of sexual violence are the ones who do not have the space to move around freely. Similarly they do not have safe spaces that help them to deal with what they have gone through. The fact that the women in the extract above had to see her perpetrator "interact, date and hook up with other women" while she cried "tears in the shower" shows the ways in which victims can be isolated.

### **Narratives on Institutional Responses to Sexual Violence**

This narrative theme focused on the media's reporting of the various university management's responses to the concerns of sexual violence raised by the students. The discourses by the media revolved around reporting what the institutions were said to be doing about sexual violence at its campuses.

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**Task teams and policy enforcement.** The first sub-theme from the articles focused on the institutions and their reactions to incidents of sexual violence. One of the prevalent accounts given was the creation of task teams and new structures as a means to provide resources for victims of sexual violence. In addition to providing these spaces, the task teams were also portrayed as a way of investigating the occurrences of sexual violence on campus while simultaneously serving as a warning sign to perpetrators of sexual violence. The extracts below give an example:

*Task team to tackle Wits sexual cases. A special task team will be assembled to assist with tackling cases of sexual harassment at Wits University in Johannesburg. (Published in the Citizen on 5 September 2013)*

*UFH warns male students to behave: Task team formed to investigate harassment. University of Fort Hare vice-chancellor Dr Mvuyo Tom recently issued a stern warning to the institutions male students to desist from sexually harassing their female counterparts.*

*Tom said the university had formed to ensure proper investigations and the prosecution of the cases both internally and in the criminal justice system were carried out. (Published in the Daily Dispatch on 8 August 2016)*

This sub-theme holds an important discussion within the media analysis. Firstly, it helps to show that there is a recognition of sexual violence on university campuses by people other than its victims. This is a particularly vital narrative as the societal behaviours around sexual violence often include the silencing or belittling of its existence (Gqola, 2015). Thus, having this recognition is an important way in combating the notion that universities are safe spaces for all of its students without any violence on women's bodies (Gqola, 2015; O'Toole, 2015).

In addition, a more critical interpretation of this narrative theme is the suggestion of a desire for the universities to appear to be doing something about the severity of the issue at hand. This would coincide with the nature of the article of the third extract that "UFH warns male students to behave". Instead of a warning being issued to the students and the university

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community, it is also publicised in an attempt to placate the students and to showcase the institutions actions against sexual violence. Thus, this narrative represents the institution as taking the matter very seriously.

Furthermore, there is a use of the word “behave” in the title of the same extract. This word suggests that the concern is simply a matter of misbehaviour which can be rectified by issuing warnings. However, the use of the word trivialises the nature and severity of the issue by suggesting that it is simply a small misnomer to the way that people usually behave as opposed to it being a systemic concern prevalent in the university and in society.

An additionally prominent narrative that appears from these articles and others not referenced here is that once there has been an official recognition of concerns of sexual violence, task teams are then created by the university's administration in an attempt to investigate and combat sexual violence. The task teams are portrayed to provide support services for those who have been affected by sexual violence. Although this is significant and provides an important avenue for investigation, what is of concern is the nature in which these task teams form and the purpose of their formation.

Whilst most of the stories told explain that the task teams work to investigate the reports of sexual violence on campus, few explain the task teams as having preventative purposes rather than intervention purposes. This suggests that instead of trying to dismantle the root cause of sexual violence even within the context of universities, the ultimate approach taken is one that rather deals with the aftermath of the incidences of sexual violence as opposed to the reasons why sexual violence occurs and how it is allowed to continue. This is evident in the following extract from Wits University:

*Wits' new 'offences' head: Proj Jackie Dugard to take charge of sexual harassment office for gender-related offences. In a bid to root out gender-related offences, the University of the Witwatersrand has appointed Jackie Dugard to head the recently established sexual harassment office.*

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*The establishment of the office follows a spate of sexual harassment cases that hit the institution in the past year. (Published in The New Age on 7 February 2014)*

This article was written a few months after the original article about Wits starting a task team. It denotes the creation of a sexual harassment office which arguably serves a similar service to the task team that was created in 2013. Thus, the narratives of task teams by the media works to explain that there is a consideration by the university for the safety of students around concerns of sexual violence on campus. However, through the nature of the follow up article it also serves to suggest that this narrative is not specifically centred on dismantling what the university does or does not do to allow sexual violence to occur. What coincides with this narrative is that two years later, in 2016, despite the creation of the task team in 2013 and the sexual harassment office in 2014, there is still a large concern expressed by Wits students on the safety of women's bodies relating to the prevalence of sexual violence on campus. There were also media reports on the complaints about the environment to report cases of sexual violence, and the support that victims receive concerning the punishment of the perpetrators of sexual violence such as "When she tried to report what happened to her, she was advised to drop it."

**Admiration of executive's action.** An additional sub-theme that can be noted within the context of specifically Wits university's responses and interactions to sexual violence is the narrative of praise that this institution received when action was taken against perpetrators of sexual violence. The following extract shows the aforementioned sub-theme:

***Third Wits lecturer fired for harassment.** The Commission for Gender Equality has welcomed the dismissal of a third Wits University lecturer accused of sexual harassment.*

*The university yesterday announced the dismissal of the lecturer after releasing a report into the norms, policies, and standards at Wits in relation to sexual harassment.*

*The commission's spokesperson, Javu Baloyi, said: "We commend and applaud the university with its management. They have truly come a long way in trying to rid the university of sexual harassment and violence against students. We hope and trust that*



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*other universities will follow Wits' example to take tighter measures to protect students."*  
(Published in The New Age on 6 September 2013)

When action has been taken by the university to remove the perpetrator of sexual violence, the media's narrative is often filled with admiration of the institution's initiative. This narrative plays an important role in terms of what it does to the respective readers regarding how the university is represented (Gross et al., 2006; Isaacs, 2016). Together with the discourse of the task teams, the narration of the action against the perpetrators of sexual violence by the media, works to navigate the supposed positionality of the universities concerning issues of sexual violence. The use of a comparison between Wits University and other institutions, brings to light the differing levels of the institutions responses to students concerns around sexual violence. It highlights that action is being taken but that there needs to be a closer look at the universities individually as one does not necessarily speak for all. It also works to hold all of the universities as equally accountable to the concerns of sexual violence because if one university can take action, the other universities should be held to the same standard.

However, what is of concern within this narrative is the lack of focus on the students who are perpetrators of sexual violence and whether or not they face the same consequences as the lecturers in the extracts above. The following extract shows other universities who have ongoing investigations concerning perpetrators of sexual violence:

***WSU lecturers investigated on sex charges.*** *A TOTAL of three lecturers from Walter Sisulu University campuses in Mthatha are being investigated for allegedly soliciting sex from students for marks.*

*University spokesperson Angela Church confirmed to Dispatch yesterday that last year, a lecturer from the Nelson Mandela Drive campus was even suspended amid the allegations and was not permitted on campus. "A total of three other cases, including this one, are presently being investigated for similar allegations at the Mthatha campus. The lecturer in this recent case has already been suspended pending a disciplinary inquiry," she said. (Published in the Daily Dispatch on 2 March 2011)*

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The various media articles focus on the lecturers and other men outside of the universities who have committed sexual harassment crimes, but there have been no active consequences against men who are students and other students such as tutors and assistants who are perpetrators of sexual violence. Once again, this affects the readers in certain ways by suggesting that their sons and or daughters who may be at the various higher education institutions are not offenders of sexual violence. Additionally, the narrative of the responses of the institutions creates a certain representation of what someone who commits sexual violence looks like. Furthermore, with the power from the authoritative nature of higher education institutions, this narrative has the ability to make it difficult for the believability of victims of sexual violence if their perpetrators are not necessarily lecturers.

In connection to varying identities, the article relating to the Wits professor leads into a conversation around the type of social identities that are seen to be associated with acts of sexual violence. In the South African context, violence of most kinds are most commonly reported to occur in poor black communities (Collins, 1990; du Toit, 2014). As such, most experiences of sexual violence are seen to come from poor black women by poor black men. Thus, these media articles inadvertently help to deconstruct the idea of where sexual violence occurs and by whom. The emphasis on the lecturers show that sexual violence is not necessarily related to SES.

The deconstruction of identities through the newspaper articles is particularly important with regards to intersectional feminist theory as it illustrates that there is a multiplicity of bodies who contribute to sexual violence (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). As such, there is also a complexity of different bodies who may be affected by sexual violence and so its contestation, needs to occur on an individual, interpersonal and structural level (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991).

In addition to the stories told above by the media, what is important to note is what the narratives leave out, as that also plays a role in how sexual violence at higher education institutions is constructed (Gross et al., 2006; Murray, 2003). With this in mind, it must be noted that within the extracts and articles concerning the theme of institutions response is the lack of a focus or mention of an investigation into what type of environment exists that allows sexual

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violence to persist. As in the extract above regarding the decisive nature of Wits management to deal with sexual harassment, the emphasis was on the consequences of the two lecturers who had been “preying” on young girls. However, what was not deconstructed in the articles was the fact that this predatory nature had been going on for years by these same lecturers. The article fails to mention how these lecturers were in and perpetuated an hierarchical and patriarchal atmosphere within the institutions that enabled them to do this for several years (Sabina & Ho, 2014; Valls et al., 2016). Furthermore, it must be noted that within the narrative of these lecturers, the patriarchal atmosphere within the institutions is not spoken about. Once again this plays a role into how the readers of these articles may construct truths relating to the nature of sexual violence in universities. As opposed to there being a narrative on the systemic and power-driven nature of sexual violence, this narrative suggests that it is a matter of a few individuals misbehaviour against the general norm of the institution. This representation of sexual violence may then generalise to an understanding of sexual violence as being a case of a few people misbehaving. Once again this minimises the importance in engaging and dismantling this systematic issue (Sabina & Ho, 2014).

### **Narratives on the Myth of Rape Culture**

The final narrative theme, found in this particular media analysis is the views of the media outlets themselves. Unlike, the previous narratives which focused on the stories the media told about the institutional views and the students’ views, this theme focuses on how the media reports on sexual violence at higher education institutions

The writing style used in the articles gives rise to the narrative of the myth of rape culture. In many of the articles written by the various media outlets concerning sexual violence, the articles often made use of allusive terms around their stance on rape culture. The most common way this was done was by referring to rape culture as an alleged phenomena. The following extracts below illustrate:

***Rhodes rape ructions.** An anonymous post on social media has exposed the fault line of what has been called “rape culture” at Rhodes University. (Published in The Times on 19 April 2016)*

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***UCT students have had enough of rape culture!*** *Students from the University of Cape Town staged a topless protest against rape on Tuesday.*

*The students gathered in front of the university's Jameson Hall to speak out against what they called rape culture. (Published in the Daily Sun on 12 May 2016)*

***Rhodes students in graphic protest over alleged rape culture.*** *A small group of Rhodes students yesterday held a graphic protest to highlight management's alleged slow response to their demands that students suspected of rape be suspended. (Published in the Daily Dispatch on 26 May 2016)*

It must be noted that the media reporting on occurrences of sexual violence indicates a belief in its existence. However words such as “alleged” shows that the media is choosing not to actively commit to agreeing that rape culture is a phenomenon that exists. This constructs rape culture as a myth and the depiction of whether or not it truly occurs illustrates many things. The first thing it arguably reveals is the nature of society at large. The lack of an assertive commitment to the existence of rape culture means that there is not necessarily a clear understanding of the fact that rape culture and sexual violence are interconnected (Gqola, 2015). This means that they know and agree with sexual violence being an ongoing phenomena, but that the reasons behind why people engage in non-consensual sexual activity are either not known or that there is seemingly no reason like rape culture that gives rise to sexual violence (Gqola, 2015). This is important because it highlights the background work that needs to be done in order for people to understand that sexual violence is in fact not just about the sex or about certain errant or misbehaving individuals, but that it is about having patriarchal power and exerting that power over another person violence (Gqola, 2015).

Furthermore, the interconnected nature between sexual violence and rape culture means that sexual violence, in part, cannot be understood as sexual violence, if there is no acknowledgment of rape culture. This is because the nature of rape culture culminates the idea that consent is not required in order for someone to engage in the sexual activities that they desire. This then calls into question how the media can report on the experiences of sexual violence from the universities and from the students if there is no recognition of rape culture as

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the underlying current. Once again, this may reveal the way in which the media outlets themselves understand not just rape culture, but sexual violence.

The second thing that is illustrated is the similarities between sexual violence and rape culture on an ideological level. The same way in which victims of sexual violence have to work to prove that they have been sexually violated, so rape culture has to work to prove that it also exists. The dilemma within this similarity is that sexual violence is one of the prominent ways to demonstrate the existence of rape culture (Gqola, 2015). Furthermore, the phenomena of sexual violence is believed, but the accounts of sexual violence have to actively be proven with very few perpetrators of sexual violence being convicted for their crime. As such, there is a feedback looping system in trying to prove that rape culture exists (Posel, 2005)

It also illustrates a second ideological similarity between sexual violence and rape culture by showcasing the nature of silencing. Through the media's lack of committed reporting around rape culture, there is inadvertently a silencing of its existence. This relates to sexual violence as the way in which institutions choose not to talk about it openly diminishes its existence and thus silences those it affects (du Toit, 2014). As such, the silencing of rape culture and sexual violence alike means that those affected by it are silenced. It simultaneously means that in not acknowledging its existence, it is perpetuating an environment that allows both to continue (Gqola, 2015).

Finally, through the use of words like "alleged" or "so-called" or "something that the students refer to as", there is an implicit distancing that is taking place. In addition to not committing to the existence of rape culture, these words work to disassociate the media from the phenomenon of rape culture. Once again, this draws similarities to the stigmatisation of victims of sexual violence. In the same way that people distance themselves from people who are victims of sexual violence, these media outlets are, even if it is not intentionally, distancing themselves from engaging in discussions around rape culture. This is important as it may influence how the readers of these articles come to construct rape culture and sexual violence. Words such as "alleged" can become words that society uses to construct its own narratives and truths around

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the reality of rape culture. This can be harmful as it diminishes the truth of those who have been affected by rape culture.

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### **Summary & Conclusion**

Within this research of media articles concerning sexual violence in higher education institutions, three narratives were found: 1) narratives on students' views and experiences of sexual violence on campus, 2) narratives on institutional responses to sexual violence and 3) narratives on the myth of rape culture. These narratives provided an illustration of the nature of the media in representing various social concerns such as sexual violence at universities. Furthermore, these narratives gave insight into the ways in which media is not neutral in how it engages with societal issues (Isaacs, 2016).

The findings from these narratives suggest that the media works to cover all of the aspects involved around this concern while simultaneously working to try and remain neutral on the issue. However, the nature of the reporting shows a lack of neutrality. One example of this is the reporting style of who the perpetrators of sexual violence are portrayed to be. Most of the articles reported on the investigation and firing of professors for sexually harassing students for marks. However, there was minimal engagement around students who are perpetrators of sexual violence. Thus, this worked to create a specific representation that sexual violence in universities looks a certain way: that it is about deviant individuals.

Another example is the reference of rape culture as an alleged phenomenon. The language used in media reporting around the supposed lack of existence of rape culture at universities and how that permeated into the prevalence of sexual violence, calls into question the existence of rape culture. This representation of rape culture as potentially non-existent is not neutral as it can shape the reader's constructs and truths around rape culture as it relates to sexual violence. This relates back to the previously discussed representation of how sexual violence is only because of deviant individuals like "preying professors". If this representation of deviant behaviour is constructed as truth, then it means that the narrative that rape culture does not exist can also be constructed as truth.

Finally, the narratives found suggest that sexual violence at universities is a great concern for both the institution itself and for the students. From the institutions side, it explains this through the reporting of the setting up of task teams and support services. Similarly from the

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students' perspective, it explains this through their activity of the protests. Furthermore, through the reporting of the activities of the institution around sexual violence, the media provides a perspective of support to the institutions when positive actions have been taken against perpetrators of sexual violence. However, with regards to the students, the media's narrative focuses more on relaying their experiences as opposed to engaging with them. This relates back to the previous finding of the lack of neutrality within the reporting. Finally, within the narrative of the concerns of sexual violence from the institution and the students, through the reporting of both perspectives, the media provides a window into the nature of the turmoil between the institution and the students concerning sexual violence.

However, within all of these narratives, it is important to note that there is not much critical engagement of the issue of sexual violence. Rather, the articles are written based on this idea of newsworthiness (Isaacs, 2016). With the increased level of concern by the institutions and with the surge in protests around sexual violence on university campuses, there is a greater desire to cover the topic. This desire may arguably have less to do with actually engaging with the importance of what sexual violence is and how it affects students, as it does that there is an increased interest by its readers to know what is going on (Isaacs, 2016).

Additionally, from an intersectional feminist theoretical framework, there is very little engagement with the demographic of the bodies involved and how this fits into the larger conversation of those who are more likely to experience sexual violence in South Africa. The media reporting barely makes mention of the names and identities of victims of sexual violence. This means that there could be no engagement within the media analysis of how bodies with varying social identities who have experienced sexual violence at university are represented.

Furthermore this lack of engagement with differing identities means that there is no way to identify who is most affected within these institutions. It also means there is no way to determine whether or not there is a trend that exists across the different universities and what this could speak to in relation to who the perpetrators are, the environment provided for offenders to sexually harass or violate people and what this means in relation to society at large.



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Within the articles that quote students who have experienced sexual violence at their universities, most of the names given are arguably black names representing black bodies. This may point to the nature of the intersectional and historical conversation of violence to black women's bodies, however this is not brought up within the media articles and thus could not have been investigated further within the analysis. (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). This limits what the articles are able to do with regards to starting a discussion about social identities including race, class, age and ability. It simultaneously limits the discussion of what this could mean in terms of access to safety and appropriate resources. Thus, the way in which news of sexual violence within universities is reported reveals a disengagement with the bodies and their experiences of the issue.

### **Significance**

This study is significant because it contributes to the development of a body of knowledge that is currently missing regarding the representation of sexual violence in South African institutions to society. It is also important because, having an understanding of what is portrayed in the news can lead to an understanding of society's behaviours and constructs of sexual violence and its occurrence at higher education institutions. This is vital because it allows for a dismantling or encouragement of these representations in ways that serve to correctly foster and inform society on the issue of sexual violence in universities. Additionally, through critique, it helps to raise awareness of the bodies affected by sexual violence as well as the underlying social constructions as to why sexual violence is so prevalent both in and outside of South African universities (du Toit, 2014). Furthermore, conducting this study is an important way to contest the silencing of the occurrence of sexual violence at universities and to critique the marginalisation of women's voices and the objectification of their bodies.

### **Limitations**

Despite some of the contributions made by this research in understanding the role of the media in representations of sexual violence in university and its significance, there are limitations. The first being that in contemporary society, newspapers are not the only media outlet available. As such, the demographic of the population may not have been truly

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representative of all the people that do read the news and how they come to construct truths from it. Additionally, the more technologically based media outlets often have comment sections in them which means that discussions could emerge that are critical of the articles reported. This would provide an opportunity for a multidimensional engagement with the issue at hand.

Another limitation is the prominence of social media in being a platform that engages with social issues. The students may have been given the opportunity to share their views and experiences of sexual violence by the media, however, this would not have been the only platform for them to do so. Outside of the newspaper outlets, students have the opportunity to raise awareness about their experiences of sexual violence at universities in ways that would have been accessible to read and understand outside of the news. Thus, the views from the students in the newspapers, may have been supplementary to what they were already discussing in social media spaces.

A final limitation would be the use of language. As the articles reviewed in this study were all in English, articles reported in other languages were not reviewed and thus representations within these different languages would not have been taken into consideration in the analysis of this study.

It would be beneficial for future research to investigate the role of the media, social media and the interaction between the two in representations sexual violence in South African universities. Additionally, it would be valuable if it were to look at the progress over the years in the amount of media reporting in the pre and post-apartheid context as this may provide information into where the conversation of sexual violence has come from, and its trajectory. Finally, it would be beneficial for future research to look at what happens to constructs of who the perpetrators and victims of sexual violence are when media does not include social identities in its reporting.

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