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## Media And Sexual Assault

Canada, in addition to the rest of the world, is vastly initiated with the subject of justice and crime. We engage ourselves with television shows, books, newspapers and other various media to engage in topics of crime daily. Media remains an influential and innovative tool that plays an integral part in the structure of crime and its perceptions; particularly in areas such as sexual assault and such offences sexual in nature. Portrayal in the mass media primarily determines the public's perception of victims, perpetrators, law enforcement and ideals. Research indicates that the majority of public understanding about crime derives directly from the media (Roberts and Doob, 1990; Surette, 1998).

Since media is vastly accessible, it is especially imperative to examine the effects that the mass media exerts on attitudes towards crime and justice. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the media influences audience perceptions of sexual assault in terms of ideal victims and perpetrators. Along with understanding how media limits our understanding and how social norms causes a difference in perceptions of these certain crimes. Mass media carries out an excellent job of identifying the ideal victim and the perfect situation. When the majority of sexual assault news stories show the same groups of people, the public starts to understand the likelihood of sexual assault crimes will occur against certain people and will be perpetrated by certain people. When the topic of sexual assault comes to mind, people will habitually think of the victim as being a Caucasian, heterosexual woman who belongs to the middle class whereas the perpetrator is interpreted as a Caucasian man or a man of colour. It is without a doubt that the majority of sexual crimes happen at the hands of males, but that is not to say that females are irresponsible for sexual crimes as well. While very few sexual assault crimes committed by women occur, we must equally recognize those crimes as well. Crime is crime, no matter by whom it is committed and how often that group of people commits it.

Most people think that most sexual assault happens to women by men, but there are many cases where women or other men harass men, or even women assaulting other women. Unlike popular belief that most sexual assaults are heterosexual in nature, homosexuals also commit crimes against others of the same calibre. These crimes occur, but many of these cases do not tend to capture enough attention as it does not feature the ideal victim and perpetrator. We are spoon feed media ideals that cases generally have ideal victims and perpetrators, and we are unaware of the fact that crimes can feature other people as well. In sexual assault cases, ideals are not only in the form of the perfect victim and perpetrator but also perfect situations. The concept of an ideal victim situation as one that is proposed as more innocent than others; these ideals are often reinforced in the media. A woman assaulted while minding her own business at home is seen as an ideal situation compared to a situation in which a woman brought a man home after encountering him in a bar.

Receiving legal victim status remains an issue when considering sexual assault. Ideal victims like women, children and the elderly are taken into higher consideration and given almost instant victim status. Whereas, men, drug addicts, sex workers and the homeless have a much more challenging time with victim status as media causes us to believe that there are many more factors at play. When putting all the factors as mentioned earlier into consideration, it is clear that there is a hierarchy of victimization and that race, gender, economic status all play a

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role, whether it is performed intentionally or not. It is ultimately the public's responsibility to scrutinize the situation further and to reassess their definition of rape and to understand that things outside the vast majority exist. It is important not to fall criminal to media bias. A significant influence of the public's perceptions of rape is primarily based off of social norms and expectations; the media condone many of these elements of society. It is without a doubt that just like how victimization and ideal victims are shown in the media, social norms are also displayed as well. Cases like sexual assault are subject to controversy, stigmatization, victim blaming and social expectations. In regards to women who are victims in sexual assault cases, many factors in the case are questioned and scrutinized by the public. In ways that promote and condone misogyny, victim blaming and it brings up the topic of rape culture. When a woman is raped, she is hit with multiple questions that hint at victim blaming and misogyny. Slut shaming is a sub-component of victim shaming in which a woman feels guilty for certain sexual behaviours that deviate from traditional values. This is not only represented through deviant sexual behaviours but also in terms of clothing and appearance. It is believed that those who dress provocatively are more likely to get raped; however, studies show that those who dress modestly are also equally victims of rape.

It goes to show that clothing has nothing to do with the likelihood of committed sexual assault. Norms are not only condoned in media such as news channels, newspapers and such professional forms but it is manifested within pop culture. There are several music videos in which women are objectified and sexualized. These vulgar videos often show scantily clad women and are products of encouraged violence towards women, since this type of media is quite popular. Many people believe what they are witnessing on a screen is morally correct to do. In a way this branches into the concept of rape culture where rape is normalized because of societal opinions on gender and sexuality. There are also many misconceptions when it comes to rape, unlike contrary belief that strangers commit rape; it is actually the opposite where rape is committed by those whom the victim knows. This also raises the question behind getting raped by a significant other, since sex is consensual, anything beyond that is considered rape. Even if you are in a committed relationship, this is something that the public is unaware of. The public also does not seem to understand the meaning of consent as many people believe a spouse cannot sexually assault the other spouse. Female victims have a difficult time in rape cases, and the public can question why some women do not report rape cases. There are many multiple factors for why many cases go unreported. Women feel that the hassle of reporting a rape case have many personal belittling factors as well. Some reasons a woman might not want to report her rape would be because they would not want to punish someone or ruin their life because of the issue. Also, they do not want to bring any attention to themselves and want to avoid talking about the rape as much as they can to forget that such a traumatizing event ever happened to them.

Because of the subject of slut shaming and victim blaming, women may feel there is no use to reporting an assault if it is just going to get unnoticed and not get paid attention. Due to the victim blaming, women believe they could garner a lousy reputation for potentially lying about an assault or for being the one who sexually provoked the perpetrator. Staying quiet seems like the best bet instead of getting ostracized and questioned by society. Men can have it even harder than women. Sexual assault happens less frequently with males than compared to females, but we need to consider it as well. Mostly men's cases go unreported for many reasons like women, but for many different reasons and most of it has to do with society's norms and gender expectations. The ideal personality traits for a man is to be strong, courageous and not to show weakness, which is the main reason why they choose not to report assaults or act upon

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them. The male stereotype established by society suggests that males should be tough enough to avoid rape in the first place if raped by a man. When sexual assault is presented, there is the implication that despite initial impedance, the victim secretly craves and obtains satisfaction from the attack. (Smith, 1976 )It is suggested that men are sexually thirsty that if a woman raped them, they would enjoy it; however, getting sexually assaulted is not a pleasant experience.

Reporting an assault would undermine a man's masculinity as it is a sign of submission and weakness. Just like women, they are subject to blame and disbelief as people believe a man cannot get attacked. Again like women, men blame themselves for the attack since they are more capable of fighting back and getting themselves out of the situation. Media can also show an abuse of power being something that is normalized in today's society. Often in some cases of sexual assault, a woman decides to stay quiet because her attacker is a public figure or person of power. Sometimes, people with power technically get away with making vulgar comments, making advancements or even committing the act of sexual assault. Many teachers in North America have been caught having sexual relationships with their children, and it is seen as a sick abuse of power as a teacher is considered to be a higher figure in a child's life. Due to the authority a teacher has such as the responsibility of grades and reporting bad behaviour to parents, this can make a child willingly have sex with the teacher.

Many political figures have also abused their power in terms of taking advantage sexually. Donald Trump being an iconic perpetrator, often making vulgar comments about women in general terms and most famously in a 2005 audio transcript. It was considered morally wrong by the public, however tensions ceased, and Donald Trump got away with his actions. Our society places much value on societal hierarchal order and the claiming and maintenance of power. Often this power gets expressed as power over others, as seen as taking advantage of people, whether it be verbally or physically. Norms about influential people promote exploitation by powerful people against those who have less power. A sick abuse of power is seen in today's society and can have ties with media portrayal and sexual assault. In conclusion, media is a vastly accessible tool significant for usage of gathering information on a day to day basis. The mass media comprises of multiple cultural forces that may contribute to the construction of public replies. ( Malamuth and Briere, 1986 ).

When it comes to crimes such as sexual assault, it is imperative to understand that the media influences how the public views sexual assault. Media influences audience perceptions of sexual assault in terms of ideal victims, perpetrators; social norms and the abuse of power. The public is thought to identify ideal situations, victims and perpetrators through media due to the general coverage that features certain people repeatedly. It is vital for the public to understand that a rapist and a victim do not technically have an exact profile, so it is challenging to victimize based on gender, sex and other factors. Understanding that things outside the vast majority exist is imperative. Other than ideal victimization, the media condones society's values and norms. Sexual assault is subject to controversy, stigmatization and victim blaming. Women are blamed for sexual assault and have their outfit questioned as the public believes that it correlated with the likelihood of the attack.

Along with this, women are less likely to report crimes due to the feeling of guilt and the fear of being publicized and ostracized. Men's cases also go vastly unreported as society proposes that men are strong enough not to get raped in the first place and can easily fight off their offender. Society's expectations are also another reason why men do not report, the fear of showing submission and weakness. Abuse of power has ties to sexual assault as well and is

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another element condoned in the media and perceived by the public. Many people fear and submit to people of power as social order and maintenance of power is an integral part of human civilization. In some terms, power promotes exploitation over those who have less power, and it may feel like an offender can commit whatever offences they wish. Media is an influential tool in which we entertain and educate ourselves daily. Everyone enjoys media; however, it should be scrutinized further to prevent bias in terms of crime and justice. It is ultimately the public's responsibility of carrying out the scrutiny and the reassessing of sexual assault as there are many wrong ideals that media condones. It is important not to fall criminal to media bias.

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