

FULL PAPER

“A rape is a rape is a rape” – A qualitative content analysis of male rape frames in UK print media

„A rape is a rape is a rape“ – Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse männlicher Vergewaltigungsdarstellungen in britischen Printmedien

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“A rape is a rape is a rape” – A qualitative content analysis of male rape frames in UK print media**„A rape is a rape is a rape“ – Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse männlicher Vergewaltigungsdarstellungen in britischen Printmedien***Maria F. Grub*

Abstract: Using data of $N = 70$ articles from newspapers in the United Kingdom, this study explores whether UK print media of both broadsheet and tabloid press make use of issue-specific frames (Entman, 1993) in the reporting on male rape. Current UK legislation does not recognize women as perpetrators of male rape; this was also reflected in the majority of articles addressing male rape. A total of nine frames were identified following Mayring's (2015) approach to qualitative content analysis. The frames can be differentiated into situational, victim, and perpetrator frames. The reporting includes (male) rape myths based on sex stereotypes placing perpetrators and victims in unequal power dynamics. In line with previous research, the findings can be related to sex-role socialization, which places men and women into stereotypical categories of masculinity and femininity. In addition, sex-role socialization is expanded by matters of sexual orientation: Stereotypes of femininity are projected on homosexual men and the victims are placed in a subordinate role compared to the perpetrators. The comparison of tabloid and broadsheet press shows that both portray male rape similarly. However, tabloids put greater emphasis on entertainment and use ways that are more in touch with the audience to illustrate male rape.

Keywords: Male rape, rape myths, rape frames, framing, print media, socialization

Zusammenfassung: Diese Studie untersucht anhand von $N = 70$ Zeitungsartikeln, ob britische Printmedien der Qualitäts- und Boulevardpresse themenspezifische Frames (Entman, 1993) über die Vergewaltigung männlich gelesener Personen verwenden. Die derzeitige britische Gesetzgebung erkennt Frauen nicht als Täterinnen von Vergewaltigungen an Männern an; dies wurde auch in der Mehrzahl der untersuchten Artikel widergespiegelt. Insgesamt wurden neun Frames anhand von Mayrings (2015) Ansatz zur qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse ermittelt. Die Frames können in Situations-, Opfer- und Täter-Frames unterschieden werden. Die Berichterstattung umfasst (männliche) Vergewaltigungsmythen, die auf Geschlechterstereotypen beruhen und Täter und Opfer in ungleichen Machtdynamiken darstellen. In Übereinstimmung mit früheren Untersuchungen können die Ergebnisse mit der Geschlechtsrollensozialisation in Verbindung gebracht werden, die Männer und Frauen in stereotype Kategorien von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit einteilt. Darüber hinaus wird die Geschlechterrollensozialisation durch Fragen der sexuellen Orientierung erweitert: Stereotypen von Weiblichkeit werden auf homosexuelle Männer projiziert und die Opfer werden im Vergleich zu Tätern in eine untergeordnete Rolle gedrängt. Der Vergleich von Boulevard- und Qualitätspresse zeigt, dass beide die Vergewaltigung von Männern im Zusammenhang mit ähnlichen

Themen darstellen. Die Boulevardzeitungen legen jedoch mehr Wert auf Unterhaltung und verwenden publikumsnähere Mittel, um die Vergewaltigung von Männern darzustellen.

Schlüsselwörter: Männliche Vergewaltigung, Vergewaltigungsmythen, Printmedien, Sozialisation

1. Introduction

“Women were more likely than men to be victims of sexual assault in the last year.”, reads a headline in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) report on sexual offenses in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2022). A bar graph (see Appendix A in OSF) summarizes the numbers of female and male victims by type of abuse, i.e., any sexual assault, rape, or assault by penetration and indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching. However, when looking at the graph, one bar seems to be missing: Male victims of “rape or assault by penetration.”¹ According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center: “81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime.” (2023). The statistics show that men are also being raped. However, the UK, a country with the highest number of recorded rape cases in Europe (Beswick, 2017), theoretically did not get its numbers wrong, and yet, men were raped.

Defining rape has challenged researchers and lawmakers for centuries now. Rape describes “the physical and sexual use of another person’s body without that person’s consent.” (Baker, 1999, p. 233) and is, therefore, a human rights violation that stands in contrast with sexual autonomy and sexual sovereignty (Horvath & Brown, 2013, p. 3). Any occurrence where a victim does not want to engage in sex but is coerced or forced to do so, or is unable to (dis)agree, is to be classified as rape (Williams, 2015, pp. 428–429).

In feminist writing, rape is a gendered term that fosters patriarchal power structures in Western society (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 343). Feminists argue that it does not matter *where* a victim gets raped, *what* a victim’s relationship to the perpetrator is, or *when* the incident happened because “A rape is a rape is a rape.” (Bonnes, 2013, p. 211). But this raises the question: Why does it matter *who* the victim is?

The legal framework of the UK accepts this gendered definition of rape. It did not acknowledge male rape until the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act* in 1994 (Cohen, 2014, p. 24). From then on, it was “an offence for a man to rape a woman or another man.” (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994, p. 142). Since the *Sexual Offences Act* (2003), rape is defined as forced vaginal, anal, or oral penetration (p. 1). Although men are now recognized as potential victims, women are not legally recognized as perpetrators. This likely explains the absence of male rape cases in the previously mentioned ONS report. While male rape accounts for a smaller portion of cases, the estimated number of both male and female victims is

1 The ONS report does not include non-binary people in its statistical reporting. When this manuscript refers to “male” and “female” (or “man/ men” and “woman/ women”), it refers to the person’s born sex as reported by the UK media/ government. Henceforth, the article will use the term “sex” to distinguish between men and women, and will omit the term “gender”. The author would like to point out that they do not support a binary gender classification. The exclusion of non-binary and trans people from analysis is only due to the lack of data material in the UK data.

much higher, including male victims of female perpetrators (Williams, 2015, p. 429). As though women are more likely to become victims of sexual assault, men report similar circumstances (Banyard, 2007). Findings from a survey by Choudhary and colleagues (2010) support this:

Table 1. Relationship with perpetrator and gender of the perpetrator (past 12 month victimization only)

Relationship With Perpetrator	Gender of Perpetrator by Category of Victimization					
	AI		CI		ACI	
	Wtd % (n = 633)		Wtd % (n = 127)		Wtd % (n = 187)	
	Male Perpetrator	Female Perpetrator	Male Perpetrator	Female Perpetrator	Male Perpetrator	Female Perpetrator
Current intimate partner ^{a,b}	0.87	11.99	1.49	13.26	6.93	21.55
Former intimate partner ^{a,c}	3.05	18.06	0.00	23.98	0.00	8.96
Friend/acquaintance/coworker	51.46	59.82	40.49	55.32	28.61	53.47
Parent/stepparent ^c	5.27	0.40	23.15	1.60	44.98	5.29
Stranger/other ^d	39.35	9.74	34.87	5.84	19.48	10.72

Note: Wtd = weighted; AI = attempted intercourse; CI = completed intercourse; ACI = attempted and completed intercourse. Response included only those who experienced sexual violence in the past 12 months
a. Responses include spouse, girlfriend, or boyfriend.
b. Differences between male and female perpetrators are statistically significant in "AI" victimization category; $p < .001$.
c. Differences between male and female perpetrators are statistically significant in all three categories of victimization; $p < .05$.
d. Differences between male and female perpetrators are statistically significant in "AI" and "CI" victimization categories; $p < .05$.

The data outlines the relationships between victims and perpetrators of sexual violence, namely current intimate partner, former intimate partner, friend/ acquaintance/ coworker, parent/ stepparent, and stranger/ other. Furthermore, the data is broken down by gender of the perpetrator (male or female) and the instance of victimization: Attempted Intercourse (AI), Completed Intercourse (CI), and Attempted and Completed Intercourse (ACI). It shows that perpetrators are predominantly male across all categories, though significant female perpetration is also reported. Friends, acquaintances, and coworkers are the most common relationship type for both male (AI = 51.46%; CI = 40.49%; ACI = 53.47%) and female (AI = 59.82%; CI = 55.32%; ACI = 28.61%) perpetrators. Furthermore, regarding the categories “parents/ stepparents” and “strangers/ other”, the percentage of male perpetrators is much higher than female perpetrators (e.g., $ACI_{\text{parents/stepparents}} = 44.98\%$ for male perpetrators compared to $ACI_{\text{parents/stepparents}} = 5.29\%$ for female perpetrators) (Choudhary et al., 2010, p. 1535). This differentiation into acquaintance rape, including date or spousal rape, and stranger rape is a common way to distinguish rape situations (e.g., Bevacqua, 2000, p. 154; Serisier, 2018, p. 57). However, as discussed in the results, sexual violence is often committed by individuals known to each other, particularly friends or acquaintances, regardless of perpetrator gender, and the idea that stranger rape is more prominent is a common misconception (Choudhary et al., 2010).

Misconceptions about rape are deeply rooted in our society. Social constructions – such as gender, race or religion – are foundational to systems of oppression and power (Brubaker, 2021, p. 724). The patriarchal system emphasizes power, domi-

nance, and control, often perpetuating violence to maintain hierarchy (Kaplan, 2024, p. 6). Within such systems, rape serves as a tool of domination, which occurs on many levels (e.g., rape as part of warfare (Wood, 2018) or the music industry (McCarry et al., 2023)). This applies not only to women as victims but to men as well. Male rape can thus occur as an assertion of dominance, emasculating the victim and stripping them of agency within a patriarchal framework that equates masculinity with power and invulnerability (Reed et al., 2020, p. 163). Through early socialization processes, men and women are placed into categories according to their born sex, leading to stereotypes and myths about what is considered “male” and “female” (Fadnis, 2018, p. 1753).

As print media still represents one of the main news sources in the UK (Ofcom, 2023, p. 3), it will be the subject of this article and henceforth be used interchangeably with “the media”. The way that a rape situation, victims, and perpetrators are framed in the media affects the public’s perception of rape and the acceptance of rape myths (Barnett, 2012, p. 18). Moreover, through media effects, reporting may reinforce stereotypes and shape the recipients’ perceptions (Genner & Süß, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, it is important to consider whether stereotypes about rape (including rape myths) are represented in the press, as the media’s portrayal of rape fosters these stereotypes and shapes society’s view of rape (Hust et al., 2023, p. 477). This will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the UK’s perception of male rape and offer suggestions for the press in dealing with rape cases. Therefore, this study will examine *how male rape is framed in the UK broadsheet and tabloid press, and to what extent the framing of male rape conveys stereotypes and rape myths based on sex-role socialization in the United Kingdom*.

Research on male rape has primarily only examined male-on-male incidents, particularly childhood victimization (Fromuth & Burkhart, 1989; Miller & Lisak, 2002), or rape in prison (Mulholland & Manohar, 2023; Scacco, 1982). This paper will therefore expand on current research by including cases of female perpetrators and male victimization outside of an institutionalized setting. The analysis is based on a combination of Entman’s (1993) framing approach and Mayring’s (2015) approach to qualitative content analysis to deduce media frames. The aim is to determine how the media reflects sex-role socialization and myths about male rape. The results will be discussed within the cultural background of the UK, and whether rape as solely a feminist issue must be reconsidered.

2. Review of the literature²

2.1 Sex role socialization and rape myths

According to sex-role theory, men and women are attributed with characteristics based on their biological sex, placing them into stereotypes of being “male” and “female”, deciding the roles men and women occupy in society (Eagly et al., 2016,

2 The literature review will focus on empirical evidence from Western countries, which are assumed to share a similar cultural and socialized background to the UK (i.e., USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, and Sweden), and define the research objectives similarly (e.g., sex roles, rape myths).

p. 459). Stereotypes are common beliefs about specific social groups that link potentially false associations to their behavior (Jecker, 2014, p. 184). This shapes cultural beliefs about sex-role stereotypes (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 446) and our attitudes towards and acceptance of these roles (Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 30).

In most Western (primarily Anglo-American) societies, male role expectations are defined through a set of certain physical, emotional, and behavioral characteristics (Eagly et al., 2016) such as physical strength (Reed et al., 2020, p. 163), body shape and size (Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 32), heterosexuality (p. 33) and lustfulness (p. 35). Furthermore, maleness is linked to (sexually) aggressive behavior (Cohen, 2014, p. 14), dominance (Reed et al., 2020, p. 163), and a lack of emotionality (Lisak, 2006, p. 320). Female features, in contrast, include “vulnerability, submissiveness, and emotionality” (Reed et al., 2020, p. 163), softness, and a lack of self-efficacy (Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 31). Men who exhibit feminine features are perceived as non-male, breaking traditional sex norms (Lisak & Ivan, 1995, p. 296).

Rape myths emerge from such sex-based stereotypes (Zenovich & Cooks, 2018, p. 405). They are understood as “prejudicial, stereotyped and false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Long-established rape myths mainly apply to female victims, but most of them can also be applied to cases of male rape (Anderson, 1999, p. 389). Reed et al. (2020) detected in an online survey of US college students that rape myths influence the perception of victims and perpetrators and that rape myths such as “men cannot be raped” and “real men can defend themselves against rape” were commonly accepted (p. 162).

Rape myths can be categorized into three types: Victim myths, perpetrator myths, and myths about the rape situation (Li et al., 2017, p. 775). Examples of common rape myths include that victims encourage rape through dressing provocatively (Raphael, 2013, p. 61) or that a victim is more to blame if they know the perpetrator (Bieneck & Krahé, 2010, p. 1793). A list of common rape myths derived from the literature can be found in OSF online Appendix B (https://osf.io/59umr/?view_only=f88e9204ca1c4a038c41d9a9de5d6722).

Research shows that rape myths are not only prevalent in society but are often even internalized by victims of rape. For example, rape victims are faced with difficulties in recognizing the crime and struggle to come forward as they often feel ashamed (Banyard, 2007, p. 63) or question their sexuality (Gartner, 2018, p. 9). Multiple studies conducted in the USA show that especially heterosexual men feel embarrassed about reporting their victimization (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996, p. 445; Gartner, 2018, p. 9). This aligns with findings by Choudary et al. (2010) that gay and bisexual men were more likely to report rape than heterosexual men (p. 1525).

Building on this, Wakelin and Long (2003) discovered differences in the attribution of blame regarding sex and sexual orientation in a study with UK participants: Female victims who identified as heterosexual were blamed more than male heterosexual victims, and in general, more blame was attributed to the victims than the perpetrators (Wakelin & Long, 2003, p. 484). Davies et al. (2006) expanded these findings and discovered that male British participants were more negative towards

male victims if the perpetrator was female, and the male victim identified as heterosexual (p. 286).

2.2 Framing rape in print media

According to Entman (1993), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (p. 52). Frames can significantly alter how an audience perceives even controversial issues (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019, p. 1), often without realizing that a specific frame has been employed (Tankard, 2003, p. 97). The media in this way co-constructs and co-constitutes socialization and how individuals are “receptive to specific stereotypes portrayed in media” (Genner & Süss, 2017, p. 2).

Multiple studies have identified issue-specific frames – frames that only apply to specific issues (Jecker, 2014, p. 43) and address content-related aspects of these issues (Matthes, 2014, p. 60) – in media reporting about rape (e.g., Hindes & Fileborn, 2020; Nilsson, 2019). The reporting often incorporates rape myths (Nilsson, 2019; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2019) and reflects patriarchal power structures (Hindes & Fileborn, 2020, p. 643). This is especially evident in the reinforcement of sex roles and stereotypical display of what constitutes “male” and “female” (Harway & Steele, 2015, p. 376). A study on masculinity and femininity in the British national press revealed that reporting favored references to masculinity and, linking it to power and strength (Baker & Baker, 2019, p. 380). The coverage of rape is often embedded in cases that involve celebrities and makes use of overdramatization and sensationalism (Barnett, 2012, p. 15). Further detected framing devices include what the Canadian researcher Susan Ehrlich (2001) named a “language of assault” (p. 26). This includes, for example, sexist vocabulary, emotive language, and victim-blaming language (Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2019, p. 885). Victim blaming is evoked through a focus on victim details during the rape situation, e.g., level of intoxication (Barnett, 2012, p. 20) or physical attractiveness (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 446). Furthermore, labeling victims and perpetrators, e.g., through applying shared responsibility (“violent couple”, Lamb & Keon 1995, p. 211)), a dichotomy of “bad girl – good guy” (Barnett, 2012, p. 19), or othering the perpetrator as “monster” (VanSlette & Hinsley, 2017, p. 7), adds to biased perceptions of rape, shifting the degree of agency, i.e. the person in control of the situation, from the perpetrator to the victim (Ehrlich, 2001, p. 39). Rape situations are trivialized through terms such as “fondling” or “having sex” (Kitzinger, 2013, p. 83) or avoiding the use of “rape” altogether (Bohner et al., 2009, p. 527).

This was shown to influence audiences, leading to increased victim-blaming and acceptance of rape myths (Li et al., 2017, p. 775), and altering understandings of sexual violence and consent (Hindes & Fileborn, 2020, p. 643). People question the legitimacy of a rape incident as well as the roles of victim and perpetrator (Bonnes, 2013, p. 211).

Research so far has primarily focused on female rape rather than male rape, and the framing devices that were mentioned cannot simply be transferred to male rape. In her book *Male Rape is a Feminist Issue*, Cohen (2014) criticizes the predominantly feminist reading of media reporting of male rape, which assumes that only

the rape of women is a direct consequence of patriarchal societal structures (p. 4). Consequently, male rape is not considered a real phenomenon (p. 93). This manuscript deviates from early feminist research on rape and does not perpetuate a solely sex-based stance on rape; hence, the existing frames on rape in print media must be considered with caution, as male rape frames may deviate from existing literature.

3. Research method

A qualitative content analysis, following Mayring's (2015) inductive, structural approach, was conducted, paired with Entman's (1993) framing approach. Mayring's (2015) approach involves several steps of analysis, which can be broadly summarized as: (1) Establishing the material, (2) the direction of analysis, (3) choosing the type of analysis, (4) interpretation of the results and categorization, and (5) application of quality criteria. A full overview and description of the coding process can be found in Appendix C (see OSF). This also includes an overview of the applied quality criteria to ensure validity and reliability (Krippendorff, 1980).

The sample was drawn by a keyword search of "male rape," "male rape victim," and "female perpetrator" from UK newspaper articles³ published from 1990 to 2024 available on the LexisNexis database ($N = 1,413$). This period was chosen in light of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, as well as the preceding years from 1990, in case there were any reports leading up to the new law. Articles with fewer than 100 words and articles covering only female victims of rape, childhood abuse, reports from outside the UK, as well as personal statements of survivors, were excluded in the first screening of the data. This left a total of 412 articles. All articles were then sorted into broadsheet ($n = 144$) and tabloid ($n = 268$) articles and labeled according to their main topic to gain an initial overview. A full overview of the articles can be found in Appendix D (https://osf.io/59umr/?view_only=f88e9204ca1c4a038c41d9a9de5d6722).

The analysis was conducted using a qualitative content analysis following Mayring's (2015) approach of structural analysis. The method was chosen as qualitative analysis aims to detect patterns and meanings embedded within a text, "to identify cultural themes and meanings associated with a particular set of texts and in a particular space and time." (Gutsche & Salkin, 2015, p. 15). Through the inductive approach, these patterns can be detected directly from the material, offering deeper insights into the topic, while also following a systematic approach (Mayring, 2015). In line with Mayring's (2015) approach, the analysis followed an inductive, iterative process (see Appendix C in OSF). In the initial assessment of the material, frame elements were identified. In the course of the analysis, patterns emerged, including references to outside sources, dramatizations, narratives, and contextual patterns. By applying the dimensions based on prior research (e.g., rape myths,

3 The following newspaper outlets were included for Broadsheet press: *The Times* (including *The Sunday Times*), *The Guardian*, *The Herald*, *The Belfast Telegraph*; and tabloid press: *The Independent*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail* (including *The Mail on Sunday*), *The Mirror*, *The Manchester Evening News*, and *The Scotsman*.

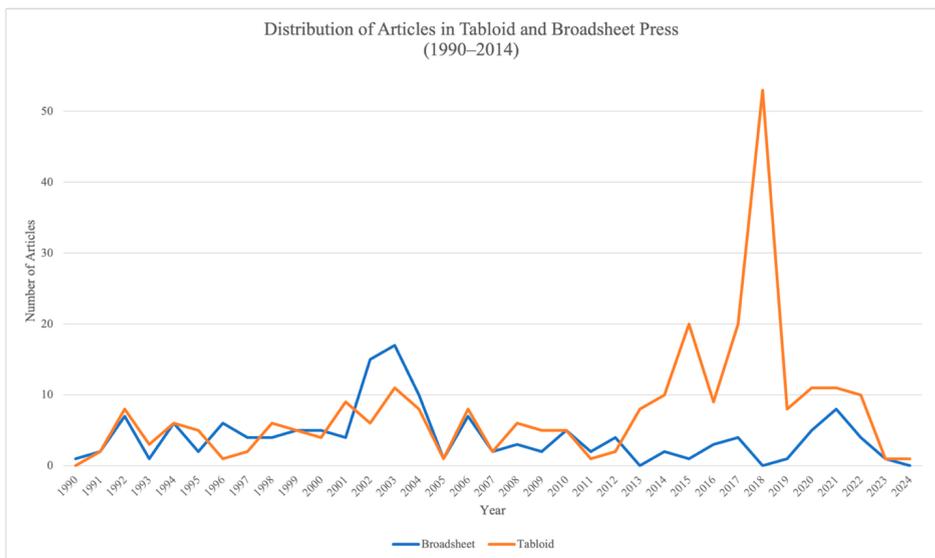
lexical findings, agency, and detail-inclusion), it was possible to generate a first set of categories and characteristics. In total, the analysis consisted of five repeating cycles until no further categories were derived and saturation was achieved. The categories were placed into “typical” characteristics, allowing the construction of prototypes. These prototypes are the frames that will be described in detail in the following sections.

In the process of qualitative analysis, the sample size was not predetermined; instead, the material was coded until theoretical saturation was reached. The final sample was drawn using a random number generator, alternating between tabloid and broadsheet press. Ultimately, 35 articles each were coded in the main analysis ($N = 70$). During the screening, nine articles explicitly addressing female perpetrators of male rape were identified and analyzed in an additional, explorative analysis step.

4. Descriptive findings

In the last 34 years, a total of 412 articles published in the UK press addressed male rape. Tabloids address the topic more frequently ($n = 268$) than broadsheets ($n = 144$). Regarding the timely distribution of publications, male rape is evenly presented in the print reporting, with a spike for broadsheet articles between 2002 and 2004 and an all-time high for tabloid articles in 2018. The overall distribution is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of articles in tabloid and broadsheet press (1990–2024)

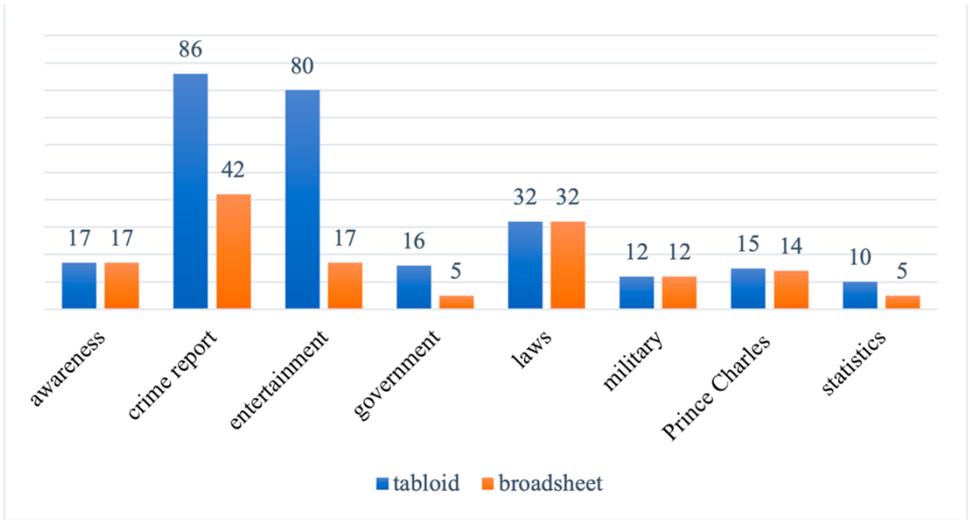


The outliers can be explained by the primary topics that the articles address. The reporting in broadsheets addressed the issue of a male rape case involving the staff of Prince Charles in 2002–2003. Articles in 2004 deal with a prominent rape case

in the British armed forces. The spike in tabloids is due to an episode of the popular soap opera *Coronation Street*, which aired in 2018 and included a storyline about a male rape case.

Examining the overall topic distribution, crime reports account for most of the reporting about male rape. Crime reports comprise all such articles that address reported incidents of male rape. This includes police reports, detailed portrayals of rape incidents, as well as reports about victims and perpetrators. Other topics, such as law issues and spreading awareness (e.g., reports about charities) are equally present in tabloids and broadsheets. A comprehensive overview of the topic distribution is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Topics by broadsheets and tabloids



The framing analysis revealed situational, victim, and perpetrator frames, each with respective sub-frames. The frames will be regarded in detail in this section:

4.1 Situational frames

4.1.1 “Male rape = gay rape” frame

In both the broadsheet and tabloid press, male rape is portrayed as an issue that occurs solely within the homosexual community. There is, however, some differentiation between homosexual and heterosexual victims as well as perpetrators. The articles refer to a “gay rape culture” (T10) and “gay-bashing” (T3). *Gay rape culture* means male rape is seen as happening only among members of the gay community. It is seen as equivalent to female rape incidents. Gay rape victims are viewed as victims of male dominance and are placed in a subordinate position, for example: “Young gay men will likely make the most silent, compliant victims.” (T10). Some tabloid articles describe the issue as more pressing than female rape,

presenting it as an often undetected and neglected crime. The analysis revealed differences in victimisation: Homosexual victims, especially those targeted by heterosexual perpetrators, are presented as more vulnerable because of their sexuality. The media also points out that heterosexual victims are often faced with the rape myth of being perceived as gay for becoming victims and having their sexuality questioned. In cases involving heterosexual perpetrators, the crime is related to male dominance over another man through so-called *gay-bashing*. This refers to the act of humiliating another person for being gay, for example: “There is a clear group of men who, although they lead a heterosexual life outside, regard themselves as very macho and see the aggressive act of penetrating another person as something manly.” (T3)

Most articles avoid using the word “rape” and use “sex act” (B4) instead. Articles that include the word mainly refer to it as “gay rape” or “homosexual rape”, even more so in the broadsheet press. Male rape is trivialized as “non-consensual homosexual activity” (B5), implying no clear distinction between male rape and “gay sex”. This is further reinforced by describing rape as “anal encounters” (B3). Descriptions of male rape in the context of anal penetration are often accompanied by judgmental evaluations (e.g., “deeply unattractive”, B4).

Overall, male rape is predominantly referred to as an act within the gay community, often not even acknowledging it as a crime, with female perpetrators excluded from the definition. Common rape myths of male rape are supported by the analyzed media. Through lexical choices like using gay rape interchangeably with male rape, the crime is limited to a specific situation and actors. Broadsheet press makes more use of this frame than tabloids.

4.1.2 “Culture of silence” frame

Although male rape is identified as a crime and occasionally described as “very serious” (B10), the article addresses a so-called “Culture of Silence” around rape. By including current studies, statistics, or references to researchers and law enforcement in the articles, male rape becomes more transparent, and the tone is serious. However, there is a “blanket of silence surrounding male rape.” (B8). The topic is viewed as a “sensitive subject” (T2) without significant awareness. This is linked to a lack of knowledge, as one article puts it: “[W]e know nothing about the perpetrators of rape on men and only something about the perpetrators of rape on women.” (B1). The analysis revealed that articles try to emphasize the urgency of the topic and tackle the myth that men cannot be victims of rape. This awareness only regards male-on-male rape. The voices of rape survivors are only present in the context of charities like Survivors Manchester. Otherwise, male rape victims remain passive in the reporting and are hence silenced by the media themselves.

The “Culture of silence” frame is present in both tabloid and broadsheet press. Both undermine the frame with references to statistics and expert voices; however, the tabloid press puts greater emphasis on the influence of the media and addresses the sensitivity of the crime, whereas the broadsheet press emphasizes the problem but does not provide solutions to end the silence.

4.1.3 “Male dominance” frame

Both the broadsheet and tabloid press link male rape to male power, calling it a “crisis in masculinity” (B3). This frame aligns with the myth of male dominance over women and other men, as perpetrators seek to prove their sexuality: “Imagine the power a man feels degrading and humiliating a woman or a child, and think how much more power they would feel doing it to a man.” (T3). The “Male dominance” frame applies to both perpetrators and victims, as broadsheets note victims’ reluctance to report, linking this hesitation to male stereotypes. Broadsheets also stress victims’ physical size and strength, portraying them as unlikely victims (B33).

Male rape is linked to male dominance in both the broadsheet and tabloid press. There are differences between perpetrators and victims. While tabloids emphasize the power frame only regarding perpetrators and their intent to prove their maleness by raping other men, broadsheets also apply male dominance to male rape victims who feel reluctant to come forward due to male stereotyping. Therefore, with the “Male dominance” frame, UK print media, on the one hand, supports the common rape myth that rape is a crime conducted by men only; however, it also tries to tackle the myth by addressing male stereotypes.

4.1.4 “Violent attack” frame

Most articles presume that male rape is always violent, overlooking the use of other forms of coercion, such as emotional or psychological manipulation. This aligns with the common rape myth that rape only qualifies as rape if there is evidence of physical force. The articles emphasize that rape is a “violent attack”; e.g., in most articles, “rape” is used interchangeably with “attack”, or the mention of rape does not occur at all. The analysis revealed that emotive adjectives are added to emphasize the violence of the attack. This includes, for example, “brutal” (B9), “nasty” (T1), “vile” (T15), or “savage” (T34).

This trivializes male rape by failing to acknowledge non-violent strategies used by rapists, such as coercion or psychological abuse, and making it more challenging for male victims to be taken seriously. Furthermore, the tabloid press makes more use of emotive wording, evoking a sense of dramatization, and its style resembles fictional writing.

4.1.5 “Broader political narrative” frame

Reporting on male rape is often embedded within a broader political narrative. This relates to structural problems in the UK, particularly the laws regarding rape (B32), as well as the overwhelming demand for police officers to address the issue. For example, articles describe how the police were unprepared to handle the crime due to a lack of trained officers (B35). This frame is often paired with other framing devices.

This political narrative seamlessly connects to broader debates about the origin of perpetrators, further shifting conversations toward immigration laws. For instance, an article discussing a perpetrator seeking asylum in the UK suggests that

authorities should “boot him out of the country”, stating he “must be deported.” (T28). Such sensationalism is particularly evident in reports on large-scale rape cases, including those involving football coach Barry Bennell, soldier Leslie Skinner, or Reynhard Sinaga, who likely raped more than 200 men and filmed his offenses, making it the “biggest rape case in British legal history.” (T32)

A specific narrative was constructed around a scandal involving the Royal Family. In 2002–2003, articles covering rape allegations among the staff of Prince Charles prompted extensive reporting in both tabloids and broadsheets. The tabloid press made extensive use of sensationalist reporting. The events were woven into a narrative surrounding Prince Charles and Princess Diana. The focus was either on Charles’ involvement or Diana’s so-called “intrigue” (T12). Emotive phrasing supported the sensationalized coverage, with examples such as “royal fears” or “sensational collapse” (T16). To support the narrative, Palace voices were interviewed and referenced in the articles. However, these references were used to support the so-called “intrigue” rather than addressing the male rape allegations themselves. Broadsheet coverage particularly emphasized the “damage” inflicted upon the royal family (B6). The events were downplayed as “the Burrell episode” (B2), trivializing the rape and emphasizing the episodic damage to Prince Charles’ reputation. In both tabloids and broadsheets, the crime was not the sole focus and instead portrayed as secondary. There was little emphasis on the rape itself, and the main story was built around the royal actors. The victim and perpetrator were considered as supporting characters within the royal narrative. In the future, it will be important to examine whether incidents like these evoke issue-specific frames, such as a “Royal Family” frame in news coverage.

4.1.6 “Soap opera” frame

A frame predominantly observed in tabloid press is the “Soap opera” frame. These articles focus on portrayals of male rape in an entertainment context, emphasizing the importance of addressing this topic in the media. It is viewed as a symbol of hope, aiming to break the culture of silence and encourage survivors to come and seek support. This is particularly noticeable in the reporting on the show *Coronation Street*, which aired an episode in 2018 where one of the main characters was raped by a male acquaintance. The coverage praises soaps for portraying “upsetting topics” (T19) and references charities and playwrights to discuss the issue. The importance of the media is emphasized, as these articles suggest that it portrays the real world and therefore serves an educational function for the viewers. For example, “Ryan, who worked closely with the charity Survivors Manchester, said: ‘I knew it would be a challenging storyline but a very important storyline.’” (T20)

In contrast to the tabloid press, the broadsheet press only occasionally mentions the portrayal of male rape in soap operas, but does not pay particular attention to the topic compared to the tabloid press. This is especially noticeable in its reporting on the soap opera *Coronation Street*, which is not featured prominently in broadsheet reporting.

4.2 Victim frames

4.2.1 “Vulnerable victim” frame

In both the broadsheet and tabloid press, male victims were stereotypically portrayed as “young vulnerable men” (B30). Victims were described using emotive and judgmental adjectives like “naïve” (B5) or “distressed” (T28). There was particular emphasis on their situation prior to the rape. Oftentimes, victims were portrayed to have been in a troubled emotional state, for example, after a conflict with their partner. This style of reporting shifts blame onto the victims. It portrays them as easier targets to blame. Their already vulnerable state is exacerbated by the rape situation, making them appear helpless. For example: “David will be left feeling shame and disgust over what has happened to him.” (T2). The victim’s experiences are framed within a dramatic narrative, shifting the focus away from the crime itself and instead attempting to evoke a sympathetic response towards the victim. This emotional approach allows the audience to see the severe consequences on the psychological state of victims; however, it also places victims in a vulnerable, damaged position.

Furthermore, the articles frequently employ passive voice or even agentless passive constructions. This implicitly shifts blame away from the perpetrator, who is either unmentioned or not portrayed as the active agent in the situation. For example: “A man has been raped in a daylight attack in Edinburgh city centre.” (B15). Passive voice places the victim in an acting position and partially exonerates the perpetrator. Phrases such as “alleged victim”, “the victim claims”, or the avoidance of the words “rape” and “rapist” shift blame from perpetrators to victims even further. The term “survivor” is almost exclusively used in the context of charities like Survivors Manchester, or in the rare instances of direct speech, e.g., “Sitting down with Jack and talking through some of my own experiences as a survivor.” (T29).

The articles differentiate between male and female victims. While mentioning a lack of support for men, who may feel reluctant to come forward, they offer no guidance for affected individuals. The narrative quickly shifts from male victims to female victims, as female rape remains the more prevalent phenomenon. However, rape myths persist for both groups. Statements like: “And before we consider overturning a fundamental tenet of Scots law, perhaps we should expect young women to change their risky and self-destructive behavior.” (B34) demonstrate that blame is still often projected onto (female) victims rather than the perpetrators. This perpetuates these myths.

Both the tabloid and broadsheet press utilize the “Vulnerable victim” frame. However, since the broadsheet press tends to address the topic of male rape from a less personal point of view (e.g., law reviews), this frame is observed more frequently in the tabloid press.

4.2.2 "Brave victim" frame

The "Brave victim" frame attributes qualities such as bravery, strength, and courage to male rape victims who come forward, as seen in comments like, "it is very unusual for a man to come forward after this kind of incident, and he was brave enough to do it" (T34). This frame appears almost exclusively when rape victims are the focus of the article, which is, however, rare. Speaking out is associated with breaking the culture of silence around male rape: "I am determined to help break the silence on a subject still seen as a taboo." (T26)

The "Brave victim" frame is less prevalent than the "Vulnerable victim" frame and particularly found in recent, victim-centric reporting. No significant differences were found between the broadsheet and tabloid reporting regarding this frame.

4.3 Perpetrator frame: "Sexual predator" frame

One primary perpetrator frame emerged in the analysis: The "Sexual predator" frame. The perpetrator was directly labeled as "sexual predator" (T10), "evil predator" (T32), or "sex beast" (T28). This language creates an inhumane image of the perpetrator, likening them to a monster that preys on victims. In addition, perpetrators are described as "Psychopath[s]" (T15) or "sado-masochistic" (B5), which creates a dissonance between the image of a "normal person" and that of a rapist. There is often extensive background reporting on perpetrators, including details such as the attacker's marital status (B30) or education (T15). Emphasis is placed on prior offenses and whether the perpetrator has previously exhibited (sexually) aggressive behavior, especially in the tabloid press. Both tabloids and broadsheets commonly portray perpetrators as sexual predators, supporting the rape myth that perpetrators are sex-starved psychopaths. The tabloid press more frequently includes details on the perpetrator's previous offenses and aggressive behavior, while the broadsheet press often includes external statements by the police and courts to emphasize the "Sexual predator" frame.

4.4 Portrayal of female perpetrators

The analysis revealed that nine articles explicitly discuss female perpetrators of male rape. Due to the limited sample size, it was not possible to deduce issue-specific frames. However, an in-depth analysis following Mayring's inductive approach revealed certain tendencies in reporting. Generally, the legal context surrounding male rape was discussed: Rape by female perpetrators is recognized and referred to as a "last taboo" (F2). The articles convey the perception that female perpetrators are more likely to be victims themselves. There is greater emphasis on first proving the allegations against women before labeling them as perpetrators compared to men. The articles often provide elaborate backstories on why women become perpetrators. These backstories situate them within traumatic narratives, such as being forced to work as a "sex-worker" or in "nude-modelling" (F3). This portrayal creates an almost pitiful impression of the perpetrators. Furthermore, rape is often framed within a "love story" narrative (F3). In some cases, a woman allegedly wanted to

“win her man back” (F3) or rape was said to be caused by male rejection (F6). Female-on-male rape is exclusively depicted as acquaintance rape, implying that it does not occur outside of a relational context. While this agrees with findings showing female perpetration is much higher for acquaintance rape (particularly compared to stranger rape) (Choudhary et al., 2010, p. 1535), this depiction is also associated with less violent behavior than rape by male perpetrators, focusing on blackmail, threats, and lies, rather than physical force, which is mentioned as being used “more seldom” (F2). Portraying the situation in this way makes rape seem less severe. The term “rape” is often replaced with words including “lovemaking” (F3) or “sex act” (F6), and stronger emphasis is placed on other crimes, like kidnapping (F3).

Interestingly, the focus on appearance that was previously noticed regarding male perpetrators is also applied to male victims, emphasizing that the scenario deviates from the norm. For example, a victim’s family status (F1) or physical size (F3) is highlighted. The occurrence of female perpetrators is portrayed as almost sensational, with headlines such as “Mormon Sex Slave” or descriptors like “bizarre” (F3).

In recent years, the topic of male rape has also been associated with transgender rights. Articles now address the issue within the broader debate about the distinction between sex and gender. The media provides a platform for a TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) narrative, and by using harsh and accusatory language, trans rights are questioned. Deliberate misuse of the perpetrators’ pronouns reflects an anti-trans stance. Women are portrayed as the real victims, as they are purportedly even more endangered by transwomen. The articles frequently shift focus away from the male victims to engage in a larger debate about trans rights in the UK.

5. Discussion

As anticipated, and in line with previous research on female rape, the analysis identified three types of frames: Situational frames, victim frames, and perpetrator frames (see Li et al., 2017, p. 775). Situational frames, which encompass general perceptions of rape as well as specific situations, were the most frequently observed, ultimately leading to the identification of six distinct frames. Two victim frames were identified: The “Vulnerable victim” and the “Brave victim” frame. The former was more prevalent, while the “Brave victim” frame appeared primarily in more recent news coverage. Additionally, the analysis revealed a single perpetrator frame – the “Sexual predator” frame – and provided first insights toward the portrayal of female perpetrators of male rape.

Overall, the UK print media reporting on male rape reflects existing UK legislation on the crime. Only nine articles explicitly address female perpetrators, and even in these cases, female perpetrators are often portrayed as victims themselves. While most articles acknowledge male victims, the “Male rape = gay rape” frame links the crime predominantly to a homosexual context. Since rape is framed as limited to male actors, sex-role socialization is further influenced by sexuality. Female stereotypes are projected onto male victims of rape, placing them in a subordinate role to perpetrators. This finding supports Baker and Baker’s (2019) conclu-

sion that the press endorses stereotypes and connects masculinity to attributes of power and strength (p. 380). The stereotypical representation of men and women is further expressed through the “Vulnerable victim” and “Male dominance” frames. Rape is associated with male power and sexual dominance, affecting both perpetrator and victim depiction. This aligns with previous findings that rape myths, shaped by patriarchal ideals, remain common in reporting on rape (Hindes & Fileborn, 2020, p. 643). It also supports that male rape is rooted in the patriarchal oppression and dominance over others (Brubaker, 2021, p. 724).

The results indicate that myths are commonly supported within perpetrator frames. The frames promote the depiction of perpetrators as monsters (VanSlette & Hinsley, 2017) or sociopaths (O’Hara, 2012), as seen in the “Sexual predator” frame. The exclusive categorization of perpetrators as inhumane predators poses a danger to the perception of rape, though. As Mack and McCann (2021) suggest, portraying perpetrators as monsters creates an image of stranger rape. This excludes the danger or downplaying of acquaintance rape and further implies that rape is a “random act of violence” (p. 105). This aligns with the priorly discussed findings of Choudhary et al. (2010) that acquaintance rape (including by intimate partners, parents/stepparents, friends and coworkers) is more prevalent than stranger rape (although it must be acknowledged that in the stranger category, 39.35%, 34.87%, and 19.48% of strangers across all three victimization categories were male perpetrators) (Choudhary et al., 2010, p. 1535). This view is reinforced by the “Violent attack” frame: While rape is acknowledged as a crime – contrary to findings that rape is often viewed solely as a sex act (Kitzinger, 2013; Young & Maguire, 2003) – it is not accorded the same degree of seriousness as female rape. The lexical choices like “attack” and avoiding the term “rape” contribute to understating the crime. Previous studies have documented the use of rape myths (e.g., Bonnes, 2013; Nilsson, 2019). Interestingly, this analysis revealed that articles both apply and criticize rape myths. Victims were seen with more open-mindedness than previously found. Articles try to tackle the “Culture of Silence” and have recently started using a “Brave victim” frame. This, however, still only pertains to male victims of male perpetrators.

Rape is primarily situated within a broader political narrative, ranging from critique of current rape laws to discussion of critical societal issues such as immigration and trans rights. The articles often provide a platform for extreme views and trivialize male rape by using it merely as a foreground to display a broader political agenda. The “Royal Scandal” case is an example of using rape as sensational gateway to discuss the monarchy. As Hindes and Fileborn (2020) stated, news coverage of rape is characterized by a high degree of sensationalism (p. 640).

The “Soap opera” frame stands out in the tabloid press, especially regarding the show *Coronation Street*. The reporting on the television show constitutes a meta-awareness of the issue, as articles stress the importance of the media in addressing the topic. It is not surprising that this specific frame is almost exclusively found in the tabloid press, as broadsheets do not regularly report on soap operas and cater to a different audience (Glaas, 2015, p. 27).

In summary, UK newspaper reporting about male rape endorses sex-role socialization in Great Britain. Tabloids and broadsheets apply similar framing devices,

although tabloids tend to adopt a more sensationalist style. The frames reinforce sex stereotypes and rape myths, as suggested by prior research (e.g., Kassing et al., 2005). Female-on-male rape is largely neglected, as reflected by the law. This limits male rape only to certain situations and actors. This is problematic for several reasons: Newspaper audiences tend to adopt the perspectives presented in the media. By reinforcing sex-role socialization, newspapers perpetuate these socialization processes and maintain the prevalence of rape myths and sex-role socialization. The crime of male rape is not fully acknowledged in terms of its seriousness. This is further supported by the reluctance of men to come forward, resulting in a high estimated number of unreported cases. Victims of both female-on-male and male-on-male rape may hesitate to report the crime or might not even recognize it as rape. Undeniably, it is more difficult to challenge sex stereotypes and rape myths in a country that limits its legal definition to only fragments of the full crime. Therefore, it is crucial that the media addresses male rape comprehensively, as it plays a significant role in shaping public perception.

6. Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of articles about male rape in the UK revealed that, although male rape is recognized as a crime, it is predominantly limited to a homosexual context. Consequently, rape remains a gendered term in UK print media, and common rape myths are prevalent in reporting. This indicates that sex stereotypes and patriarchal structures are deeply entrenched in UK society. This study advocates for rethinking the current definition of rape and expanding it to a non-gendered framework that includes male victims, female perpetrators, and non-binary and transgender individuals. Rape should not be viewed solely as a feminist issue but rather addressed with an all-inclusive approach. It is important to expand research on rape and include male rape within the field of study. The literature review revealed that much of the previous research limits the definition of rape to female victims by male perpetrators. Shifting the public discourse on male rape is an important step to ending the stigmatization and victimization of rape survivors. As a result, more victims may come forward, and support for female, male, and non-binary victims alike will be improved. This shift also implies changes in rape reporting, as the media can challenge current laws, raise awareness, and educate its audience. The media should recognize rape as a non-gendered crime and include male rape to spread awareness. The small number of articles addressing the topic over the past 30 years suggests that the issue is known to only a limited audience. Moreover, reporting should ensure equal representation of victims and perpetrators. Avoiding rape myths and gender stereotypes is essential to eliminating false assumptions about rape and changing public perception.

The objective of this research was to expand the study of rape frames in (UK) print media beyond the focus on female rape. Multiple frames – situational, victim, and perpetrator – regarding male rape were identified and scrutinized, considering potential media effects on the audiences of broadsheet and tabloid press. Further research should expand the field of male rape across different media, including digital spaces. A recent study by Gundersen and Zaleski (2021) showed that dis-

closing rape online had a positive impact on both male and female survivors. As the field is rapidly evolving, with rape increasingly discussed in digital contexts – for example, digital rape in the metaverse (Horne, 2023; Shariff et al., 2023) – such developments should be included in the analysis of (male) rape. Furthermore, the current research paves the way for further investigation into the effects of male rape frames and, hopefully, eventually expands the field beyond the binary of male and female, including considerations for non-binary and trans persons.

This study is not without limitations. It focused solely on male rape reporting in the UK; therefore, expanding research to different countries and comparing it directly with narratives of female rape is highly recommended. Furthermore, due to the limited number of articles, changes over time had to be disregarded. The method of qualitative content analysis was chosen to facilitate a detailed examination of the textual material, as the topic of male rape in print media has scarcely been studied. However, this method means that the results should be interpreted with caution. The identified frames are issue-specific and cannot be generalized outside the context of male rape. The coding was conducted by a single researcher; however, by applying Krippendorff's (1980) quality criteria of qualitative research, a high level of validity was sought.

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