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# 'It's like wallpaper': Victim-blaming, sexual violence and the media

Kathryn Elizabeth Royal

## Abstract

Research has long established that the media is inaccurate in its portrayal of violence against women, including sexual violence. It has been found to blame victim-survivors of rape, and create excuses for perpetrators. Research has also established that victim-blaming beliefs and rape myths exist within a significant proportion of the general public, and within members of our criminal justice system. Until now, little research has examined the consequences of such coverage on victim-survivors of sexual violence. This research therefore fills this gap. A total of 23 semi-structured interviews, 8 with specialist sexual violence support workers and 15 with victim-survivors of sexual violence, were conducted. A number of consequences of media coverage were identified. This includes consequences for mental health, such as the triggering of PTSD symptoms, as well as consequences for identifying and reporting sexual violence. As well as this, an analysis of a high-profile case of sexual violence was also conducted. A total of 204 articles reporting upon Ched Evans' retrial for rape in October 2016 were analysed against guidelines produced for journalists reporting on violence against women by the National Union of Journalists. This analysis found that guidelines were often ignored, replicating the inaccurate coverage that previous research has highlighted. However, adding to such research is the argument that victim-blaming is more subtle than it once appeared to be in news coverage, arguably making it harder to challenge. This thesis therefore makes an original contribution to knowledge by examining modern, high-profile coverage of sexual violence cases, and how this coverage affects victim-survivors.

'It's like wallpaper': Victim-blaming, sexual violence and the  
media

Kathryn Elizabeth Royal

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
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Department of Sociology

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## Declaration and Statement of Copyright

I confirm that no part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted by me or any other person for a degree in this or any other university. In all cases, where it is relevant, material from the work of others has been acknowledged.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to women and girls everywhere who have experienced sexual violence.

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 - Rationale and Research Questions

Previous research has examined the reporting of violence against women in the news, often finding it to be sexist, inaccurate and dangerous, obscuring the reality of sexual violence (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Benedict, 1992; Kitzinger, 2004). Coverage has been found to rely on rape myths, and to blame the victim whilst excusing the perpetrator of the violence (Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997; O’Hara, 2012; Waterhouse-Watson, 2013). This thesis does not seek to demonstrate that victim-blaming attitudes and rape myths are present in the media, as previous research has already demonstrated this, but adds to existing literature by examining how such attitudes are presented in the reporting high-profile cases of sexual violence.

Despite research establishing that the media is victim-blaming in its portrayal of violence against women, and research exploring the impact of rape myths on different groups of the population (for example, on juries and the police. For a full discussion, see Chapter 2), there has been no research which explicitly examines the consequence of this coverage on victim-survivors. Writing almost 30 years ago, Kelly pointed out that research upon the media and violence (and violence against women) had tended to focus upon whether media ‘produce, reinforce or legitimate similar behaviour’ (Kelly, 1989: 200). Research exploring the repercussions of such media on women who have experienced men’s violence has therefore ‘been totally ignored’ (Kelly, 1989: 200). The current study fills this gap, and offers a long-needed examination of the impact of the media on victim-survivors of sexual violence. It will also add to knowledge around how victim-blaming is presented in high-profile cases, and how such victim-blaming is resisted by specialist support services.

A Crime Survey for England and Wales report suggested that coverage of high-profile sexual offences and responses to reports of historical sexual violence are likely to affect police

recording of sexual offences, as well as victim-survivors' willingness to report recent and historical abuses (ONS, 2018). In addition, Cuklanz (2000: 7) argues that 'famous' rape trials reveal 'whose voice is being heard, in what ways and on what issues', and that it is through discussions of these trials that public opinion adjusts. As so few trials reach a legal verdict, it has been argued that the language used in high-profile trials '*decides* what occurred' (Waterhouse-Watson, 2013: 8, original emphasis). By the time such cases do reach court, then, the trial has arguably 'already occurred in the popular press' (Waterhouse-Watson, 2013: 8). Similarly, Soothill and Walby (1991) argue that high-profile cases receive greater media attention, becoming a currency for public discussion on rape. It is therefore theorised that high-profile cases are more invasive for victim-survivors of sexual violence and that, with a higher level of news coverage paid to these cases, they will permeate the lives of victim-survivors more than lower-profile cases.

As well as the academic rationale outlined above, my own background is also important to the research. Having begun to become aware and then angry at the gendered inequalities I saw in the world around me (reflected and perpetuated in no small part by the media), I came to identify as a feminist. This prompted me to begin volunteering with my local Rape Crisis Centre. I trained to become a helpline volunteer, and, at the time of writing, have been an active volunteer for over six years. I therefore have experience directly supporting women who have experienced sexual violence, and have been privileged that women have trusted me in this role to share their experiences. I have heard first hand women's accounts of being victim-blamed, and my practical work sparked an academic interest. Given the lack of research exploring how such victim-blaming in the media affects victim-survivors of rape, I became curious, both as a practitioner and a researcher.

Rape Crisis Tyneside & Northumberland (RCTN) were therefore a collaborating partner on this research, as were Everyday Victim Blaming (EVB). EVB are a 'training, consultancy and campaigning organisation', who focus on victim-blaming media representations of domestic and sexual violence (Everyday Victim Blaming, 2018). This includes calling out instances of victim-blaming in the media on their website and social media. Originally, the research

planned to observe EVB's work in challenging victim-blaming, including their work online and any training work they were undertaking. However, EVB is run by volunteers and, due to this and the other commitments of those running it, EVB became less active throughout the first year of the project. Therefore, the involvement of EVB in the research changed, and they instead became a key stakeholder, who were regularly kept up-to-date with the progress of the research. As a collaborator, RCTN assisted with recruitment for both sets of interviews, and there was an open offer of emotional support throughout the research, should it be required.

The research aims to answer the following three questions:

1. What forms of victim-blaming are present in the media in high-profile sexual violence cases, and how are they resisted?
2. What are the consequences of victim-blaming for women victim-survivors?
3. How do sexual violence support organisations resist these themes or mitigate their impact in their work with women victim-survivors?

To answer these questions, this research adopted a mixed methods approach. Firstly, an analysis of 204 articles reporting a high-profile case of rape was conducted. The selected case was the rape retrial of Ched Evans, a Welsh footballer. The rationale behind choosing this case is explored in Chapter 4, and an overview of the case is offered in Chapter 5. The analysis was conducted using guidelines for writing on violence against women produced by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). Chapter 4 also includes an interview with the writer of these guidelines, who had been working in the violence against women sector for over 30 years. As well as this, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Eight of these were with Rape Crisis staff and volunteers (the 'supporters'), as all of these participants were involved in delivering direct support work. Fifteen interviews were then conducted with women who have experienced sexual violence. Both sets of interviews explored how participants felt cases were reported in news media (using the example of Ched Evans' retrial, or another high-profile case if offered by the participant), how this had affected victim-survivors, and how such victim-blaming can be resisted.

## 1.2 - Context of the Research

This research took place in a time of high coverage of sexual violence. In the wake of abuse committed by Jimmy Savile, a British TV personality and fundraiser, investigations such as Operation Yewtree, and the subsequent trials, have been a feature in the UK press. As well as this, the final interviews with victim-survivors took place in the very early days of the #MeToo (before the popularity of the hashtag would become synonymous with the movement), with abuse committed by Harvey Weinstein, a powerful Hollywood producer, coming to light. Therefore, some of the interview participants touch upon these reports as an emerging story, but it is worth noting that the coverage was far from at its peak and had not yet become the global movement it has since grown and evolved into at the time of writing.

## 1.3 - Defining Rape and Sexual Violence

In order to be able to conduct research on rape and sexual violence, a definition is needed. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines rape as:

(1) A person (A) commits an offence if—

(a) he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis,

(b) B does not consent to the penetration, and

(c) A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

(2) Whether a belief is reasonable is to be determined having regard to all the circumstances, including any steps A has taken to ascertain whether B consents  
(Sexual Offences Act, 2003)

However, Kelly (1989: 41) points out that the law does not recognise all forms of violence against women, and argues that a feminist definition of sexual violence must 'be sensitive to woman's perceptions and understandings'. She therefore offers the following definition of sexual violence:

Sexual violence includes any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact (Kelly, 1989: 41).

This research focuses on rape, as defined by the Sexual Offences Act, although it is also useful to have a broader understanding of sexual violence, as offered by Kelly, particularly when this takes into account women's experiences of acts.

#### **1.4 - Sexual Violence in England & Wales**

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales ending March 2017 estimates that 20% of women and 4% of men have experience some form of sexual assault since the age of 16, with 3.1% of women having experienced this in the last year (ONS, 2018). Of these, 31% did not disclose their most recent experience of sexual violence to anyone, and 83% of victims did not report it to the police (ONS, 2018). Of those that did report to the police, 49% said they did so to prevent it happening to someone else, whilst 58% of victims had told someone they knew personally, and for those that disclosed to someone but did not report to the police, 47% said this was due to embarrassment and 40% thought the police would be unable to help (ONS, 2018). Over a quarter felt the police would not believe them, and over a fifth did not want to go to court (ONS, 2018). For 45% of female victims of rape or sexual assault by penetration, the perpetrator was a current or ex-partner (ONS, 2018). Only 13% of female victims reported the perpetrator as being a stranger (ONS, 2018). 99% of offenders were male (ONS, 2018). However, the Crime Survey for England and Wales has been criticised for a number of reasons, including for a cap on the number of incidents it records (Walby et al., 2016). In spite of this, it remains the 'best source of data on violent crime' (Walby et al., 2016: 1208).

Despite the number of reported rapes being 'through the roof', standing at 41,186 in 2016/17 (up from 16,374 in 2012/13) (End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2018a), Crown Prosecution Service data published in September 2018 showed that there was a 23% *decrease*

in the number of charges made by the CPS from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (CPS, 2018). Data accessed through Freedom of Information requests and published by the *Guardian* also revealed that less than a third of men aged 18-24 tried with rape were found guilty, the lowest of any age group, despite accounting for more than a quarter of defendants (Topping and Barr, 2018). Another article showed that CPS prosecutors were encouraged to take 'weak cases out of the system' to improve performance (Topping, 2018), with the End Violence Against Women Coalition (2018b) calling this 'an assault on women's ability to get justice'.

These statistics highlight that experiences of sexual violence are therefore highly gendered. As such, this research adopts a feminist understanding of sexual violence (which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter) and is therefore concerned with sexual violence committed by men against women. The statistics also highlight some of the concerns around the criminal justice system's handling of rape, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

### **1.5 - Victims or Survivors?**

The language used to refer to women who have experienced men's violence, including domestic and sexual violence, has been long debated by feminist academics, with no widespread agreement. 'Victim' has been argued to have mostly negative associations, whilst 'survivor' has also been criticised for being entirely positive, thus reinforcing the negatives of being a 'victim' (Regan et al., 1996). The terms have also been argued to create a dichotomy between being either a 'victim' or a 'survivor' and representing life post-sexual violence as being a 'journey' from living as a victim to living as a survivor (Regan et al., 1996). Regan et al. (1996: 94) call this idea of a journey 'naïve and inappropriate'. Therefore, whilst this term is imperfect, 'victim-survivor' will be used throughout this thesis, unless explicitly referring to women engaging with the criminal justice system. It is hoped that 'victim-survivor' conveys the range of experiences women may have and recognises that there is not a single experience of, nor a linear journey between, being a 'victim' or a 'survivor'.

## **1.6 - Structure of the Thesis**

This chapter has introduced the topic of the thesis, including an overview of sexual violence in England and Wales, and the definition of rape that will be used throughout this research. It has also offered some important information to understand the context in which the research was conducted. The next chapter will explore relevant academic literature on sexual violence and violence against women, building upon the statistics offered in this chapter. Following this, a second chapter on literature will explore the media and how news media has been found to represent violence against women previously. This will include an overview of the very brief previous literature on the consequences the media may have on victim-survivors of sexual violence. Chapter 4 will explore the methodology used in the research, including the rationale behind using guidelines for reporting on violence against women in the media analysis, and discussion of an interview with the writer of the guidelines. Chapter 4 also includes reflections on my own experiences of conducting the research. Chapter 5 presents and discusses the findings of the analysis of 204 news articles covering the rape retrial of Ched Evans. Chapter 6 presents the findings of the eight interviews conducted with supporters of women who have experienced sexual violence, discussing the consequences they have seen the media have upon victim-survivors of sexual violence, coverage of sexual violence in news media, and how to resist the victim-blaming that is present within such media. Chapter 7 will discuss the findings of fifteen interviews conducted with women victim-survivors of sexual violence, exploring how they have been affected by media coverage and how we can resist victim-blaming in the media. The following chapter discusses the two sets of interview data alongside relevant literature, before the final chapter brings the thesis to a close.

## Chapter 2 – Sexual Violence

### 2.1 – Introduction

There are a number of key areas of literature to consider which are relevant to this research. This includes previous work on sexual violence, including sexual violence within the criminal justice system, and work linked to victim-blaming, such as the concepts of victim precipitation and rape myths. As well as this, work on news coverage is also relevant. This chapter will explore the literature on sexual violence, whilst the next will explore news media, and reporting on violence against women.

### 2.2 - Sexual Violence

This section of the literature review will offer an overview of sexual violence. It will begin with an exploration of feminist theory in the area, including explaining the theoretical viewpoint taken in this research. It will then explore the role of specialist sexual violence services, and finish by building upon the overview of sexual violence in the criminal justice system that was offered in the introduction of the thesis.

#### 2.2.1 - Feminist Theory

This research utilises a feminist understanding of violence against women. There is no one singular form of feminism because, as Stanley and Wise (1990: 21-22) argue, whilst women may share common experiences and life events, they experience these in different social contexts which shape the experience in different ways for each woman. The beliefs central to conducting feminist research on violence against women will be discussed in the methodology chapter of this thesis. To be more specific, this research adopts a radical feminist approach to understanding men's violence against women, particularly sexual violence.

Walby (1990: 3) distinguishes radical feminism from other forms of feminism by its 'analysis of gender inequality in which men dominate women as a group and are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women'. Men's violence is considered to be 'part of a system controlling women' (Walby, 1990: 3), and is therefore a topic of much concern and research for radical feminists. Radical feminists believe that our society is patriarchal, existing within 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (Walby, 1990: 20). This definition is key, as it does not work on the idea that it is every single man who has power over every single woman, but understands that there is a structural and societal system which allows men to dominate over women.

Brownmiller (1975: 15) describes rape as a process by which '*all men keep all women* in a state of fear', whilst Stanko (1985: 9) has suggested that 'to be a woman – in most societies, in most eras – is to experience physical and/or sexual terrorism at the hands of men', with these experiences shaping women's every day behaviours (there will be further discussion of this 'safety work' later in the chapter). Sexual violence, alongside other forms of men's violence, is therefore seen by radical feminists as central to the oppression of women by men, with Walby (1985: 143) calling male violence a form of power over women 'in its own right'. The term 'sexual violence' itself 'recognises that violence is a gendered phenomenon within the context of patriarchal social relations', whilst also recognising that violence from men to women is often sexual (Radford et al., 1996: 3). Kelly (1988: 26) argues that the fact that women are expected to 'live in intimate contact with those who have power over them' makes women's subordination 'both pervasive and insidious'. For feminists, the way violence is 'used and acted out in relationships, encounters and institutions is specifically gendered', and is both a construction and a reflection of a patriarchal society (Radford et al., 1996: 4).

Kelly (1988) argues that acts of male violence sit on a continuum. When analysing interviews with women, Kelly (1988) recognised that most women had experienced sexual violence in their lives, but that these experiences were not reflected by the law, nor by previous research. This idea of a continuum is echoed by Stanko (1985), who discusses the everyday nature of

women's experiences of male violence, with an understanding of some male behaviours as 'aberrant', such as the brutal murder of a woman by her male partner, whilst others are understood as 'typical', such as wolf whistling on the street (1985: 10). Feminists have therefore argued for understanding acts of male violence not as individual and isolated, but as linked. For example, Westmarland (2015: xi) has argued that it is key to 'join up some of the dots' between different forms of men's violence against women, and that it is only by doing so that the connections between such forms of violence can be made clear. Similarly, Stanko (1985: 18) has suggested that 'by separating women's experiences of sexual and/or physical assault...we see each assault as an aberration or a random occurrence – a personal problem', which is isolated, rather than a common experience. For Kelly (1988), then, the phrase 'continuum' is not meant to 'rank' women's experiences of male violence, nor is it meant to imply that there is a linear relationship between different experiences. Rather, the use of 'continuum' is based on two of its dictionary meanings:

First, 'a basic common character that underlies many different events'; and, second, 'a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and which cannot be readily distinguished'. The first meaning enables us to discuss sexual violence in a generic sense. The basic common character underlying the many different forms of violence is the *abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force men use to control women*. The second meaning enables us to document and name the range of abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force whilst acknowledging that there are no clearly defined and discrete analytic categories into which men's behaviour can be placed (Kelly, 1988: 76, original emphasis)

The idea of a continuum of men's violence is therefore not a hierarchy of acts (to do so, Kelly argues, would be inappropriate), but an understanding that experiences may not always fit into discrete categories, whilst recognising the similarities between different forms of men's violence. Kelly's continuum therefore includes acts such as the threat of violence, sexual harassment, flashing, obscene phone calls (which, alongside flashing, could be updated to include the unwanted sending of sexual messages or photos of men's genitals via social media), as well as rape, domestic violence and incest. Kelly (1988: 95) therefore argues that 'sexual violence is a characteristic feature of all women's lives', and that investigating

prevalence in terms of women's cumulative, not individual, experiences is of 'crucial importance'.

As well as this, women's experiences are invalidated, and women 'are systematically encouraged to minimise' incidents of men's violence (Kelly and Radford, 1996: 19). Kelly and Radford (1996: 20) note that, in order to be able to speak about an experience, 'one must first be able to name and define it'. It is therefore a major accomplishment of feminist theory and practice to 'find/create/redefine' words which reflect the experiences of women, and create concepts which did not previously exist (Kelly and Radford, 1996: 20). This minimisation of men's violence against women and children also occurs in the criminal justice system and in policy, and Kelly and Radford (1996:31) suggest that it is 'simply impossible to legislate against all forms of male behaviour which women experience as abusive', and that mass resistance by women is needed to eliminate patriarchal attitudes and behaviours. Despite this, they do not advocate that feminists abandon legal reform, and argue we should aim to be creating more inclusive definitions within the law (Kelly and Radford, 1996: 31-32).

Linked to the silencing and invalidation of women's experiences of male violence discussed above, Romito (2008) has highlighted the six 'tactics' behind the two 'strategies' that hide men's violence against women and children. She describes these as 'mental operations - ways of seeing, conceptualising and naming reality – which materialise in behaviour, are deposited in common sense and become ideology...and may be institutionalised' (Romito, 2008: 43).

The six tactics Romito theorises are:

1. Euphemising – this involves the use of language to hide men's violence, and includes the mechanisms of linguistic avoidance, whereby men disappear from texts on male violence against women and children, and euphemising, whereby a phenomenon is labelled in an imprecise way which obscures the seriousness or perpetrator of the violence. These mechanisms can be both subtle and crude (Romito, 2008: 45).
2. Dehumanising – this, Romito (2008: 47-48) argues is 'essential' to being able to commit cruelty without remorse; presenting women as non-human, alongside the

removal of the individuality of women, serves to justify and legitimise the violence committed against them.

3. Blaming – this ‘represents a powerful mechanism for moral disengagement’, in which victims of men’s violence are blamed and punished (Romito, 2008: 51), including within our criminal justice systems.
4. Psychologising – this involves ‘interpreting a problem in individualistic and psychological rather than political, economic or social terms and consequently responding in these terms’ (Romito, 2008: 69). It therefore depoliticises men’s violence against women and children in order to support the status quo and the dominant power relations (Romito, 2008: 69).
5. Naturalising – naturalising relies on ideas that ‘men commit rape because their sexual instincts are raging, uncontrollable and easily unleashed’ (Romito, 2008: 79). It works on the idea that rape is natural and a biological necessity, and draws upon ideas from evolutionary psychology and the observation of animals.
6. Separating – this, as discussed earlier, involves presenting forms of violence as distinct from each other to ‘prevent us from seeing their continuity and that they are perpetrated by the same category of people’ (Romito, 2008: 84).

It is these six tactics that form the basis for the two strategies of legitimising and denying violence (Romito, 2008: 43). Legitimising does not involve the hiding of men’s violence – it is visible precisely because it is legitimised, as it is not viewed as violence in the first place (Romito, 2008: 95). Denying therefore becomes necessary when legitimising men’s violence is not an option, and this can be done through simply refusing to see the violence and its consequences, which is practiced by a range of people and institutions, such as family members, social workers and the police (Romito, 2008: 95). It can also be carried out by attributing another meaning to the violence, such as calling rape ‘seduction, passion, hot sex and so on’ (Romito, 2008: 95). These two strategies may coexist and operate as part of a continuum (Romito, 2008: 95). Writing on the strategy of denying, Romito (2008: 126) suggests that ‘it is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing...The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain’, demanding ‘action, engagement and remembering’. Secrecy and silence are therefore the perpetrator’s first line of defence to avoid being held accountable for the

violence he has committed, and Romito (2008: 126) argues that, 'if secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of the victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens'. These strategies and tactics discussed here are central in understanding how the media reports on men's violence against women, as well as in understanding how society deals with such violence more broadly.

Feminist theory has therefore made a significant contribution to our understanding of men's violence against women, particularly sexual violence.

### 2.2.2 - Consequences of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence can have a wide range of potentially long-lasting consequences. These include physical, emotional or psychological, behaviour and material (Kelly, 1988). It is because of this that Kelly (1988: 186) argues against the use of the term 'effects', saying that this tends to limit consequences to individual psychology. Kelly (1988: 186) notes the impacts and the length of these 'cannot be simplistically inferred from the particular form of sexual violence' a woman has experienced. She further argues:

Different forms of sexual violence may have similar impacts; the same form may have different ones. Current and past experiences of sexual violence often interact resulting in a cumulative impact; a recent incident often triggers memories of, and similar reactions to, previous assault(s) (Kelly, 1988: 186)

As such, this research will use the term 'consequences' when exploring how the media has impacted upon victim-survivors of sexual violence.

Some of the physical consequences of sexual violence directly after the rape include genital injuries, such as tears or swelling, or wider physical injuries, such as bruising and lacerations (WHO, 2003). Looking more long-term, Campbell et al. (2003: 96) asked victim-survivors of rape how often they experienced symptoms from a list of 35 physical and gynaecological issues, and found that the average number reported was 16.49, with almost 40% of their

sample experiencing more than 20 symptoms every month. 80% reported feeling a lack of energy at least monthly, with 80% experiencing sleep problems and 71% experiencing fatigue (Campbell et al., 2003: 98). Physical pain was also a consequence, with 69% reporting back pain, 67% reporting headaches, 62% reporting stomach pains, 46% reporting migraines and 46% reporting severe aches and pains (Campbell et al., 2003: 98). Other symptoms included indigestion, feeling weak, numbness, dizziness, muscle cramps, painful intercourse and choking sensations (Campbell et al., 2003: 98-99). On average, participants had been raped 8.25 years ago (Campbell et al. 2003: 102), highlighting that physical consequences can be much longer lasting than the immediate physical damage caused by rape.

Mental health consequences have also been explored. Directly following the assault, these can include shock, fear, agitation, restlessness, mood swings, confusion and social withdrawal (Jordan et al., 2010; Stanko, 1985). In data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, 63% of victims reported having mental or emotional problems, and 10% had attempted suicide as a result of rape (ONS, 2018). Jordan et al. (2010) note that studies have found between 7-65% of victim-survivors develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with most studies reporting rates of 33-45%. Depression has been found to be a consequence for victim-survivors, as has dependency on alcohol or other substances (Jordan et al., 2010; WHO, 2003; Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). Flashbacks have also been reported as a common consequence (Kelly, 1988; Westmarland and Alderson, 2013), as have thoughts or attempts of suicide (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013; Kelly, 1988; Jordan et al., 2010).

Self-blame has also been discussed as a consequence of sexual violence (WHO, 2003; Kelly, 1988; Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). Kelly (1988: 211) describes self-blame as the 'internalisation of the generally held view that women are responsible for men's violence', whilst Stanko (1985: 42) states that this self-blame is a result of rape myths (discussed later in the chapter) and the responses of people around victim-survivors. Stanko (1985: 43) goes on to argue that victim-survivors can feel guilty 'on the one hand' and yet, on the other, share how frightened and paralysed they were during rape, highlighting how strong this sense of self-blame can be. Kelly (1988: 211) argues that self-blame is 'inextricably linked to ideas

about provocation and/or suggestions that it is relatively easy to prevent or limit abuse'. Kelly (1988) found evidence of this self-blame amongst women who had been assaulted by men they knew, as well as those who had been assaulted by strangers. It is through this self-blame, and examination of their own behaviour, that 'women hope to discover what they could have done differently *in order to avoid future victimisation*' (Kelly, 1988: 213, original emphasis).

However, Kelly (1988) points out that consequences are not always entirely negative. For example, she discusses victim-survivors who are lesbians, stating that 'the possibility that...survivors might choose lesbian relationships and see this as a positive choice which was influenced, but not determined' (1988: 187) by experiencing abuse has been ignored by research. Similarly, participants described consequences such as feminist attitudes (46% of rape victim-survivors) and having the right to control their own body (42% of rape victim-survivors) in Kelly's research (1988: 190), highlighting positive consequences.

Another consequence of experiencing, or experiencing the threat of, sexual violence is that of doing 'safety work':

We have become used to commentary on how women change their behaviour in order to control what can seem like an unavoidable risk, but women's calculations and actions are more complex than self-limitation. I have termed the thinking processes, decision making and embodied watchfulness that women employ 'safety work'. It is work because it occupies time, requires energy and effort – all of which could be used for more rewarding activities (Kelly, 2016: xi)

This is a concept Vera-Gray (2016) has expanded upon in her research on street harassment. Vera-Gray's participants discussed how they consciously employed methods in public spaces 'in response to the possibility and actuality of men's intrusive practices' (2016: 147). These intrusions include, but are not limited to, being followed, stared at, flashed, verbal harassment and sexual commentary, whilst the safety methods women used were also varied. These included scanning their environment, identifying points of safety (such as other women), and modifying their behaviour on public transport (Vera-Gray, 2016). Vera-Gray

(2016: 153) also describes how her participants were not only aware of who was looking at them, but of how they looked to others, and this had affected how they dressed, including what items or colour of clothing they chose to wear. This safety work is done by women on a daily basis in the face of men's intrusions, and much of it is pre-emptive, highlighting that women are living with the constant possibility and the threat of men's intrusive practices in their everyday lives (Vera-Gray, 2016). This highlights that women are affected by a continuum of sexual violence, not only what is legally recognised, including being affected by the threat of sexual violence.

### 2.2.3 - Rape Crisis Centres

In England and Wales, there are currently 44 Rape Crisis centres operating across 55 locations, and these are managed under the umbrella organisation of Rape Crisis England & Wales (Rape Crisis England & Wales, 2018a). There are a further 16 centres in Scotland (Rape Crisis Scotland). There are currently no Rape Crisis centres in Northern Ireland, although the launch of a centre in Belfast was announced in April 2018 following the trial of Paddy Jackson and Stuart Olding for rape, who were, at the time, players for Ulster Rugby team (Leonard, 2018). The lack of Rape Crisis support in Northern Ireland has been partly put down to laws which make it illegal to not report a crime you have knowledge of, meaning women face being prosecuted for disclosing but not reporting rape (Foster, 2018). Rape crisis centres were first established in England and Wales in the late 1970s, often providing support for victim-survivors in relation to criminal justice and mental well-being (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). In the US, the first centres were established in the early to mid-1970s, and began as grassroots organisations (Kennedy Bergen and Maier, 2011). A report in 2008 highlighted the chronic underfunding Rape Crisis centres in England and Wales face (Women's Resource Centre, 2008), which led to a decline in the number of centres in the 1990s and 2000s (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). This was an issue that Rape Crisis England & Wales again highlighted ten years on, with an increase in demand of specialist services for victim-survivors but a severe lack of funding (Rape Crisis England & Wales, 2018b). In 2017-18, Rape Crisis England & Wales member centres responded to over 179,000 helpline calls, provided over 650,000 sessions of specialist support (such as counselling), and services were accessed by nearly 80,000 individuals, an increase of 17% from the previous year (Rape Crisis England &

Wales, 2018b). Meanwhile, Rape Crisis Scotland's helpline supported almost 5,000 callers in 2016-17 (Rape Crisis Scotland, 2017). The Women's Resource Centre report published in 2008 stated that, despite the efforts of individual centres, 'all regions in England and Wales are vastly under-served', and that access to Rape Crisis support was a 'postcode lottery' (2008: 4). Waiting lists for services can be long, with data published in 2008 suggesting a waiting time of around three months (Women's Resource Centre), and this is likely to have increased given the recent heightened demand. Indeed, some centres have been forced to close their waiting lists, with two centres in Scotland forced to do this in the summer of 2018 (ITV, 2018). In the US, Ullman and Townsend (2007: 412) argue that rape crisis centres are 'uniquely situated to respond to the physical, emotional, and social needs of survivors'. However, centres faced similar problems to those in the UK, including a lack of funding and resource issues (Ullman and Townsend, 2007).

Academic literature has highlighted the importance of the services that Rape Crisis and other specialist sexual violence services provide, although there is a lack of longitudinal data (Brown et al., 2010a; Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). Campbell (2006) found the use of rape victim advocates offered by rape crisis centres in the United States led to improved outcomes for victim-survivors throughout engagement with medical and legal processes. Advocates therefore assist victim-survivors, whilst also 'trying to prevent 'the second rape' or 'secondary victimisation' – insensitive, victim-blaming treatment from social system personnel that exacerbates the trauma of rape' (Campbell, 2006: 31). When with a victim advocate, fewer victim-survivors were discouraged from filing a report by police (59% with an advocate, versus 81% of those without), and had their accounts questioned in a blaming manner (Campbell, 2006: 39). There was also a reduction in the reporting of feelings associated with secondary victimisation, which Campbell (2006: 40) argues 'provide some of the strongest evidence to date that [Rape Crisis Centre] services are beneficial to rape survivors'.

Westmarland and Alderson (2013) have explored these benefits of receiving counselling from rape crisis services in northern England. A tool containing themes collated from academic and grey literature, interviews and policies was created and, in collaboration with Rape Crisis

workers, was finalised as containing fifteen measures for change (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). The tool was administered to 87 clients by their counsellor within the first two weeks of starting counselling, and then again every six weeks, as long as the counsellor felt it was appropriate (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). Westmarland and Alderson (2013) found there were some significant changes with a degree of positive change for all measures, including a reduction of around half in participants disagreeing that they felt empowered and in control of their lives (from 61% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing to 31%). Of the 15 participants who reported using self-harm, this was reduced to 6 by the final data collection point, meaning that less than half were using self-harm, and there was a 26% reduction in the reporting of experiencing flashbacks (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). As well as this, there was a 25% reduction in experiencing panic attacks, a 16% reduction in thoughts of suicide, and an 11% reduction in feeling responsible for the sexual violence. These findings demonstrate the importance of the services and support offered by rape crisis centres, despite the apparent lack of importance assigned to them by funders.

Ullman and Townsend (2007) explored the barriers to engaging with rape crisis centres that victim-survivors may face. This includes the geographical and funding issues discussed above, but also includes societal attitudes, such as denying the problem of rape, as well as race and class biases (Ullman and Townsend, 2007). Participants also talked about the professionalization of rape crisis centres, whereby they become less focus on political action and institutional advocacy (Ullman and Townsend, 2007: 424). Whilst there are benefits to this, such as the standardisation of services, it also means that there may be a minimisation of feminist and social change perspectives (Ullman and Townsend, 2007: 424). This is also discussed by Kennedy Bergen and Maier (2011), where they note that rape crisis centres in the US became professionalised in the late 1970s to early 1980s, accepting funding from state, government and law enforcement agencies, hiring staff and reducing their political activism. Participants in Ullman and Townsend's work also pointed out that cost was a barrier, as many victim-survivors did not realise that rape crisis services are free of charge, so did not seek them out (Ullman and Townsend, 2007). There was also a lack of accessible services for those who spoke other languages, and those with disabilities (Ullman and Townsend, 2007).

#### 2.2.4 - In the Criminal Justice System

The introduction of this thesis offered an overview of statistics around offending and victimisation of sexual violence in the UK. This part of the literature review will explore research around the criminal justice system and sexual violence, examining how victim-survivors may be treated by the criminal justice system. Unless otherwise specified, the focus here will be on England and Wales. The rise in reported rapes but poor conviction rate has led to a 'justice gap' (or even a justice 'chasm') for cases of rape (Kelly et al., 2005; Temkin and Krahé, 2008). Four key points of attrition within the criminal justice system have been identified:

First when the police decided whether or not to record the case as an offence (i.e. whether to 'no crime it'), second, when the police decide whether or not to refer the case to the CPS, third, whether the CPS proceeds to prosecution or alters the charge through plea bargaining, and fourth, when the jury decides whether or not to convict the defendant of rape (Lees, 1996: 102)

The handling of rape cases by the police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), then the court system will be discussed, before examining alternatives to criminal justice for victim-survivors of rape.

As will be discussed later, police officers' belief in rape myths can affect how they handle rape cases. Officers' understanding of rape could also be an issue; Campbell and Johnson (1997) found that police officers' definitions of rape were often inconsistent with the reality of the law they were enforcing. There are also concerns with how rapes are counted in police practices, for example in the 'no criming' of rapes, with Temkin and Krahé (2008: 17) suggesting that this occurs when women's complaints of rape are not taken seriously and accepted by police, or, when complaints are recorded as rape, are then 'no crimed' so they do not become officially recognised. Hohl and Stanko (2015) found that 'no criming' accounted for 19% of the attrition rate in cases that weren't withdrawn by the victim. Kelly et al. (2005) found that 22% of cases were 'no crimed', whilst 33% were recorded as undetected. Just under a third were detected, but in 12% of these, no proceedings were brought, whilst

for one-fifth of cases, there was no information on the outcome of the case (Kelly et al., 2005: 36). The 'no crime' category, they argue, 'continues to be used for a far wider group of cases than counting rules designate' and that, rather than being used in very specific circumstances (such as the crime being recorded in error or happening in another geographical jurisdiction), it functions more like a 'dustbin' (Kelly et al., 2005: 38). Kelly et al. (2005: 39) also found that cases were wrongly counted as 'undetected', including where there was a named suspect who had been arrested, and even when the case had been submitted to the CPS. This research therefore highlights inconsistencies which affect police data on rape.

Police officers have also been found to overestimate the number of false allegations for rape, contributing to a 'culture of scepticism' (Kelly et al., 2005). Whilst there is no universally accepted figure around false rape allegations, partly due to issues of defining and recording (Westmarland and Graham, 2010: 97), research has established that these tend to be lower than professionals estimate them to be (Lovett and Kelly, 2009). When interviewing police detectives in New Zealand, Jordan (2004a) asked them to estimate the proportion of rape complaints they believed to be false. Whilst some avoided giving a definitive answer, those who did answer indicated a broad range from 10% to 80% (Jordan, 2004a: 143). Using European data, Kelly (2010: 1350) estimated that the likely rate of false accusations when using Home Office guidance on recording stood at 3%. Many of the police officers interviewed in the research suggested that the number would be above a third, and 'a not inconsiderable number' of officers thought it would form over half of complaints (Kelly, 2010: 1350). Kelly (2010: 1352) therefore suggests that false allegations of rape are no higher than false allegations of crime, and that 'untransparent categories' (such as 'no crime' and 'unfounded') are often cited as meaning a false allegation, when this is not the case. It is at the police stage that the highest rate of attrition of rape happens (Temkin and Krahé, 2008), and this is linked to the treatment and recording of rape cases by police.

The next stage of attrition is where police decide that there is insufficient evidence for the case to proceed, or sometimes where a perpetrator has not been identified or the case has 'no prospect of a conviction' (Kelly et al., 2005). In their research, Kelly et al. (2005) found 662

cases which did not proceed at this stage, and the reasons police recorded for this included the inability of the complainant to provide a clear account or identify a perpetrator. In the research, 41 victims could not offer a clear account of the rape, but, as Kelly et al. (2005: 54) point out, 'within this group there were several women with severe learning difficulties, several with mental health problems, and most were individuals who had been so drunk or drugged that their memory was severely impaired'. The lack of coherent account is therefore not surprising. As well as this, Hohl and Conway (2017) have argued that the focus on memories in rape cases is unrealistic and contradictory with modern scientific views on human memory, where inconsistencies, lack of detail and omissions are agreed to be a typical feature of human memory. Meanwhile, in their data from the London Metropolitan police force, Hohl and Stanko (2015) found that this stage accounted for 67% of cases that had not been withdrawn by the victim, making it the largest attrition point in their study.

The next key attrition point identified by Lees is that of the CPS deciding which cases the police submit go to court (Lees, 1996). Lea et al. (2003) suggest that the decision-making processes within the CPS need further study, and that police desire a better relationship with the CPS so as to better understand what counts as sufficient evidence. Hohl and Stanko (2015) found that the CPS decision to take no further action accounted for 14% of attrition in cases that had not been withdrawn by the victim, and that significant factors in the CPS's decision to not continue with the case included an inconsistent victim account, and whether the victim had a mental health problem. This can also be seen in the 2018 report that found CPS were encouraged to drop 'weak' cases (Topping, 2018). In Kelly et al.'s (2005) work, 80% of cases had been dropped by this point, with only 527 referred to the CPS. Of these, 61% proceeded to the trial stage (Kelly et al., 2005), marking a significant difference to Hohl and Stanko's findings. However, Kelly et al. (2005) point to missing data and cases where 'police took decisions after submitting advice files' as a reason why their data underestimates CPS's role in attrition.

The final stage of attrition is the court case, and Lees (1996: 106) argues that 'the imbalances in the trial...make it very difficult to gain a conviction'. As well as this, Lees (2002) has

suggested that victims find giving evidence in court as traumatic as the rape itself. In Kelly et al. (2005), 12% of cases made it to trial and, of these, 43% resulted in a conviction, with around half of these due to guilty pleas rather than a jury verdict. The court system has been argued to be adversarial for victim-survivors whose cases do make it to court (for example, Smith and Skinner, 2012; Lees, 1993, 2002). Lees (2002: 106) has argued that 'jurors have no idea about the power imbalances in the trial procedure...nor of how disadvantaged the complainant is'. This is reflected in the low conviction rate, as highlighted in the introduction to this thesis. For example, despite attempts to restrict the use of sexual history in rape trials, evidence shows that this is still being used, including in high-profile cases such as that of Ched Evans (Kelly et al., 2006; McGlynn, 2017; Zydervelt et al., 2017; Smith, 2018). McGlynn (2017: 391) argues that until Evans' retrial, 'there was a common assumption that third-party sexual history evidence was irrelevant in modern day rape trials', arguing for urgent legal reform on the matter. Use of rape myths has also been found in court cases (Temkin et al., 2016; Smith, 2018). In a project by the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner, 30 rape trials were observed by trained volunteers, and this highlighted use of sexual history and rape myths (Durham et al., 2016). Concerns around the cross-examination of the victim were raised in 20 of the 30 cases, with the defence barrister described as 'aggressive' in at least 23% of the trials (Durham et al., 2016). Lees (1996: 107) has suggested that, when considering the 'cumulative imbalances' in rape trials, it is unsurprising that the conviction rate is so low, and recent research appears to support this claim.

The issues highlighted above persist despite great reforms in the legal system pioneered by feminist activists and scholars, including the introduction of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) to support victims and used when collecting forensic evidence, specialist training for judges and the implementation of specially trained police officers (Temkin, 2010; Horvath and Yexley, 2012; Westmarland, in Westmarland and Gangoli, 2012). As well as this, special measures in court, for which rape victims are automatically eligible, were introduced in the *Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act of 1999* (Smith, 2018). This includes measures such as the ability to empty the public gallery, removal of legal wigs and gowns, use of video-links so the victim does not have to be physically in the court room, and the use of a screen if the victim does want to be physically present (Smith, 2018; Ellison and Munro, 2014). These have

been found to be beneficial for victims in sexual offences trials – for example, Hamlyn et al. (2004) found that 44% of complainants in sexual offence trials indicated that special measures allowed them to give evidence they would otherwise be unwilling or unable to give. However, some have raised questions about the impact such measures may have on jurors, with mixed results from research (Ellison and Munro, 2014), suggesting that further research is required. As well as this, Smith (2018) found in trials she observed that special measures caused delays in all but two of the trials, with an average delay of 75 minutes. These delays caused distress for victims (Smith, 2018). These delays are backed up by the observations carried out as part of the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner project (Durham et al., 2016). Similarly, whilst special measures also include methods for the victim to avoid encountering the perpetrator, this was still found to happen in 44% of cases (Hamlyn et al., 2004. See also Smith, 2018). Whilst special measures can be useful, there is a clear need for courts to ‘catch up’ with their use, to minimise delays and further distress. The issues outlined above around legal reforms failing to create a change in convictions highlight that the criminal justice system is not only failing to protect women but, in practice, is legitimising male violence (Lees, 1996: 111).

The lack of justice from the criminal justice system has led some to consider alternative forms of justice. For example, McGlynn and Westmarland (2019: 2) coined the term ‘kaleidoscopic justice’ to demonstrate how victim-survivors perceive justice and suggest that a reason why the justice gap remains is because ‘we have yet to fully understand the justice interests of victim-survivors’. Participants in the research identified forms of justice outside of those offered by the criminal justice system, including meaningful consequences for the perpetrator, recognition (for example, of the harm caused), being treated with dignity, prevention and being able to use their voice (MyGlynn and Westmarland, 2019). The term kaleidoscopic justice, then, aims to ‘capture the breadth, variety, complexity and dynamism of sexual violence victim-survivors’ understandings of justice’, and this includes but also extends beyond the criminal justice system (McGlynn and Westmarland, 2019: 19). Similarly, Powell (2015: 573) has argued that new communication technologies (such as different formats of social media) are ‘mediating new social practices of informal justice’, which challenge meanings of justice more broadly. There is a potential, then, for the idea of justice

to go beyond formal means, although it is important that formal justice remains an option for victim-survivors of rape.

Therefore, despite legal reforms, there remain significant issues with the treatment of sexual violence cases in our criminal justice system.

### **2.3 - Victim-Blaming, Victim Precipitation, Just World Belief and Rape Myths**

The term 'victim-blaming' has been linked to the more widely used criminological term 'victim precipitation', coined by Wolfgang (1957:1) to refer to homicides where the victim was a 'major contributor to the criminal act', versus those he described as an 'innocent bystander'. Wolfgang (1957: 2) applies the term 'victim-precipitated' to homicides 'in which the victim is a direct, positive precipitator in the crime', including cases where the eventual victim was the first to show and use a deadly weapon or to strike a blow – 'in short, the first to commence the interplay or resort to physical violence' (Wolfgang, 1957: 2). Wolfgang uses legal definitions of provocation in his work, therefore ruling out cases such as a murder as a result of the victim being robbed, a failure to pay a debt, the use of vile names, or the infidelity of a partner, writing that these mean the victim 'played an important role in inciting the offender to overt action...[but] do not constitute sufficient provision under law, and they are not included in the meaning of victim-precipitated homicide' (Wolfgang, 1957: 2). Since the coining of the term in 1957, victim-precipitation has been adopted in criminological research looking at a range of crimes, including homicide, assault and robbery (for example, Curtis, 1974; Polk, 1997; Klinger, 2001; Muftić and Hunt, 2012).

The term 'victim-precipitation' has been criticised by feminist criminologists (Walklate, 2007). Writing about the use of victim-precipitation on cases of forcible rape, Miethe (1985) called this 'the most controversial application' of the theory. The issue became particularly apparent when Amir (1971) applied the term and methodology used by Wolfgang in his study of homicide to rape, using official records and not interviewing victims, despite the fact that 'murder victims tend not to be available for observation and interview, but rape victims might

well be so' (Walklate, 2007: 45). As well as this, Amir focused on 'the perpetrator's *interpretations* of the victim's action', rendering the victim's actual intentions and behaviour worthless, and making broad generalisations (Eigenberg and Garland, 2008: 26-27). As explored earlier, the criminal justice system's handling of rape cases is an issue in itself, so the use of official records, with no critique of this as a method, is problematic. Amir (1971) therefore included a list of characteristics that could trigger a rape, including 'meeting an offender in a bar, picnic or party, possessing a 'bad' reputation and consuming alcohol' (Walklate, 2007: 45). In earlier work, Amir (cited in Miethe, 1985: 211) describes victim-precipitation in rape as:

Those rape situations in which the victim actually, or so it seemed, agreed to sexual relations but retracted before the act or did not react strongly enough when the suggestion was made by the offenders...The term also applied to cases in risky or vulnerable situations, marred with sexuality, especially when the victim used what could be interpreted as indecency in language or gestures or constituted what could be taken as an invitation to sexual relations...The vulnerable situation is assumed to operate in enhancing the offender's interpretation about the victim's availability as a sexual partner

Curtis (1974: 600) altered this definition, and instead argued that victim-precipitated rape was 'an episode ending in forced intercourse when a female first agreed to sexual relations, or clearly invited them verbally and through gestures, but retracted before the act'. Walklate (2007: 45) describes Amir's work as becoming an 'iconic target for a number of feminists'. For example, Lamb (cited in Walklate, 2007: 45) argued that such theories would allow perpetrators to 'claim that their victims are almost directly responsible for their fates, that the little girl wanted to be fondled, that the raped woman was asking for it, and that the abused wife provoked her beating'. Similarly, if most women are abused by those known to them, how are women supposed to behave in order to 'retain their status as totally innocent victims?' (Eigenberg and Garland, 2008: 30). The theory has also been critiqued more broadly. For example, Eigenberg and Garland (2008: 29) suggest that the concept 'implies that victims know how to prevent their victimisation and ignores that many people face disproportionate risk of victimisation', as well as allowing offenders to escape responsibility, both individually and within the criminal justice system. Despite these critiques, some research has continued

to use the idea of victim-precipitation to explore issues of violence against women (for example, Koss, 1985; Felson and Paré, 2005; Muftić et al., 2007).

Given the above, it is no surprise that the theory and application of victim-precipitation to violence against women has been criticised by feminist scholars, and the term victim-blaming was used to replace victim-precipitation (Clarke and Lewis, in Walklate, 2007: 45). Instead, the term 'victim-blaming' has been used more by feminist scholars and activists, referring to the blame a victim receives from institutions such as the criminal justice system, rather than trying to locate a source of blame within women for the violence they experience. For example, Walklate (2007: 141) argues that victim-blaming is not just a useful strategy for diminishing the responsibility of individual perpetrators, but 'also provides a shield for inefficient and ineffective criminal justice systems'.

One of the earliest uses of 'victim-blaming' appears to be by Clarke and Lewis (1977), who discuss victimology as being victim-blaming, and suggest this blaming has become institutionalised within academia through victimology. Clarke and Lewis (1977: 149) suggest that victimology was so readily accepted in the social sciences and studies of rape because of 'the inability of many social scientists to identify personally with the subject of their research', going on to describe 'victim blamers':

First, there is the question of self-interest, which in this case can be more accurately described as sex interest. The typical victim blamer is a male person who is doing reasonably well in a sexual way (or, at least, enjoys a position of privilege in the sexual exchange). Basically, he likes the sexual system pretty much the way it is. On the other hand, he is acutely aware of rape, sexual exploitation, and the most blatant forms of sexism...However, the victim blamer is in the rather uncomfortable position of having to seek an explanation for rape within a sexual system which provides the basis for his own sense of masculine identity. Since Western culture has encouraged male dominance in the sexual as well as in the economic and social spheres, it is very difficult for a male theorist to recognise that rape is strikingly similar to the sexual behaviour of men in general – including, perhaps, himself. No researcher has

concluded that, since the rapist is a 'normal man', other 'normal men' must be potential rapists. But what alternative conclusion can there be? (Clarke and Lewis, 1977: 150)

Therefore, male researchers have aligned themselves with victimology, locating the cause of the rape in the victim's behaviour, rather than acknowledge the wider causes of sexual violence (Clarke and Lewis, 1977). Clarke and Lewis (1977: 150) conclude that 'in this way, the study of victimology becomes the art of victim blaming'. Clarke and Lewis (1977: 155) go on to disprove some of the victim-blaming ideas present in victimology and suggest that victimological approaches maintain the status quo by 'placing a specific blame for the crime of rape upon its victim, it justifies the general guilt which women are made to feel if they are raped'. If she does not feel this guilt, then 'those around her ensure that she soon will' (Clarke and Lewis, 1977: 155), referring to the blame victim-survivors experience from the people and institutions around them.

Victim-blaming has also been a focus of feminist activists. For example, the charity Everyday Victim Blaming, a collaborating partner on this research, seeks to challenge victim-blaming in the media and society. A co-founder of the organisation, Jo Costello, defined victim-blaming as:

When we focus on the behaviour of the victim, or victims, of harm - we are victim blaming. When we ask questions of the victim, but don't consider asking questions of the perpetrator - we are victim blaming. When we assume that the victim could have changed their behaviour in order to prevent the abuse - we are victim blaming. (Costello, 2014: 7)

Victim-blaming has also been studied in other areas, such as research into health and education. For example, Ryan (1971) explored the intersections of race and poverty and blame in blaming schoolchildren for educational attainment in the United States. Similarly, Crawford (1977) argued that there was an emerging ideology which blames the individual for their illness and suggests they should take more of a responsibility for their health. He links

this to a number of issues, such as expectations of medicine, and a politicisation of environmental and occupational health issues (Crawford, 1977). This blame moves attention away from social causes of illnesses (Crawford, 1977). This blaming has been researched in other health areas. For example, studies have shown that those with AIDS are more likely to be blamed for their condition based on their gender and sexuality, and this has been linked to general negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbians (Anderson, 1992; Lee et al., 1999). Victim-blaming in relation to obesity has also been studied, with research showing that doctors are more likely to blame patients for being obese, whereas patients blame an external factor, leading to a lack of prevention and understanding of how different social environments can contribute to obesity (Adler and Stewart, 2009; Ogden et al., 2001). Victim-blaming has also been linked to social problems. For example, Tracy and Stoecker (1993) found that service providers working with homeless people may take an individualistic perspective of 'bad luck' (such as death, or divorce leading to homelessness) or 'bad people' (blaming a person's mental health, or substance use), rather than a critical focus, such as blaming a change in the local industry. Victim-blaming is therefore not unique to violence against women, but the blaming of victim-survivors is certainly wide-reaching, with it impacting the criminal justice system, health and support services and, most importantly, victim-survivors themselves.

Whilst Wolfgang's work is decades old, his ideas around victim precipitation continue to influence literature, with more recent criminological work continuing to focus on victim precipitation, including for crimes of men's violence against women (for example, Felson and Paré, 2005; Muftié et al., 2007). The criticisms of such work readied by feminists such as Walklate and Clarke and Lewis therefore remain relevant in this context, and the work of third sector organisations such as Everyday Victim Blaming highlight the continuing relevance of victim-blaming. If research continues to focus on the actions of the victim, rather than the structural causes of sexual violence, as Clarke and Lewis warned in the 1970s, then victim-blaming remains in criminological research.

This section of the literature review will therefore explore further ideas around victim-blaming, beginning with the just world belief. Rape myths will then be explored, with an overview of the term (and its more recent contention, including why this research uses the term 'victim-blaming'), and an exploration of the effects research has shown rape myths to have upon different groups within society and the criminal justice system.

### 2.3.1 - Just World Belief

The Just World Belief has been linked to victim-blaming, as well as belief in rape myths. Just world belief argues, simply, that 'individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve' (Lerner and Miller, 1978: 1030). Furnham (2003: 796) argues that this belief 'seems to provide psychological buffers against the harsh realities of the world as well as personal control over one's destiny', with Lerner and Miller (1978: 1030) arguing that this belief allows individuals to 'confront his physical and social environment as though they were stable and orderly'. Because of this, people are reluctant to give up on this ideal, and can become troubled if there is a challenge to this belief (Lerner and Miller, 1978). Just world belief leads people to 'feel less personally vulnerable and have lower perception of risk because they believe they have done nothing to deserve negative outcomes' (Furnham, 2003: 796). Lerner (in Montada and Lerner, 1998) calls this belief a 'fundamental delusion': fundamental in that 'it seems essential for most people's sense of sanity and security', and a delusion in that 'it is a factually false belief' (Furnham, 2003: 797). Just world belief states that people see innocent victims as deserving support and compensation, but when innocent victims cannot be helped, or the cost is too high, or the injustice cannot be remedied, then victims tend to be blamed for inflicting their suffering (Furnham, 2003). When the just world belief is challenged, a person can try to reinforce their own beliefs in a variety of ways:

- a) By trying to restore justice, such as punishing the offender;
- b) by trying to deny or nullify the injustice, such as blaming the victim;
- c) or by making the injustice tolerable enough for them to live with, which can be achieved by belittling the victimisation (Lerner, Miller and Holmes, cited in Hayes et al., 2013)

As re-establishing justice is often not an option for victims, it is common for people to neutralise, deny or nullify the injustice to minimise the damage to their own sense of just world (Hayes et al., 2013). Victim-blaming can therefore be strongly linked to just world belief and can be seen as operating in order for people to maintain their own beliefs in a just world, as it allows people to feel a sense of safety (Hayes et al., 2013). Belief in a just world can therefore be argued to be a coping mechanism rather than anti-social beliefs (Furnham, 2003).

Research has examined the role of just world belief in blaming victims and the acceptance of rape myths (for example, Kleinke and Meyer, 1990; Foley and Pigott, 2006; Hayes et al., 2013; Vonderhaar and Carmody, 2015). When applying just world theory to rape, Sinclair and Bourne (1998: 586) suggest that it can essentially be interpreted as meaning 'rape only happens to bad women'. Research in this area has led to findings such as participants (particularly men) with a stronger belief in a just world recommending fewer years in prison for a rapist than those with a weaker belief (Kleinke and Meyer, 1990). The same study found that men attributed significantly more responsibility to the victim of a rape than women (Kleinke and Meyer, 1990). Kleinke and Meyer (1990: 350) therefore describe women with a high belief in just world as 'especially reluctant to derogate a rape victim for a negative experience that could also happen to them'. As well as this, Vonderhaar and Carmody (2015) found a positive correlation between just world beliefs and rape myth acceptance. Foley and Pigott (2006) found that women with high and low beliefs in a just world attributed the same level of blame to a plaintiff in a civil rape case, but those with a higher belief awarded more money in damages as a way of restoring justice. Men with a higher belief awarded much less than men with a lower belief in a just world, whilst, overall, men attributed much more responsibility to the plaintiff than women (Foley and Pigott, 2006).

However, some research has found low effects of belief in a just world when considering rape. When looking at blame in cases of rape versus theft, Brems and Wagner (1994) found that gender and belief in a just world did not seem to influence how people viewed the victim and the perpetrator, and that it was general attitudes towards women more broadly that affected

the attribution of blame. Similarly, Pedersen and Strömwall (2013) argue that gender stereotyping offers an alternative explanation to just world belief. Looking at benevolent sexism and hostile forms of sexism, they found that benevolent forms of sexism was the most important factor in explaining blame levels when participants read a short vignette of either a stranger or a date rape case (Pedersen and Strömwall, 2013). Meanwhile, belief in a just world was not found to be a significant predictor of blame (Pedersen and Strömwall, 2013). They therefore suggest that benevolent sexism may mean 'more negative responses toward specific rape victims that have 'put themselves in danger' than do hostile attitudes' (Pedersen and Strömwall, 2013: 938). Drawing upon Brownmiller's (1975) idea that rape functions as a threat to limit women's freedom, Pedersen and Strömwall (2013: 938) suggest that benevolent sexism 'may be nothing more than a silent condoning of the forceful maintenance of traditional gender roles'. They therefore call the link between benevolent sexism and victim-blaming a 'pressing issue' (Pedersen and Strömwell, 2013: 940), warranting further investigation.

There is evidence, then, for the role of just world beliefs in the victim-blaming of victim-survivors of rape, but there is also evidence which suggests previous research may have overstated this link. Further research is therefore needed to explore whether it is belief in a just world, or wider attitudes towards women more generally (or, indeed, a combination of the two), that are a contributing factor towards women being blamed for men's violence.

### 2.3.2 - Rape myths

Rape myths, a component of victim-blaming (Hayes et al., 2013), have been the subject of much research, and there have been debates recently over the suitability of the term. Temkin and Krahé (2008: 33) have suggested that 'there is probably no other criminal offence that is as intimately related to broader social attitudes and evaluations of the victim's conduct' as acts of sexual violence. This section of the literature review will begin with an overview of the term, and what it means, before discussing the recent debates about the term. This will then be followed by a brief discussion of the term 'rape culture'. An overview of research that explores the prevalence and belief in rape myths will then be offered, before looking at the

impact such myths have been found to have on aspects in society, such as our criminal justice system. Resistance to rape myths will then be explored.

The term rape myths was introduced by Burt, writing in 1980. Continuing on from the discussion of just world beliefs above, Burt (1980: 219) argued that the logic of rape myths and sexual conservatism is similar to the just world hypothesis, and, as found above, the links between rape myths and a just world belief have been explored but remain unclear. Burt (1980: 217) defines rape myths as 'prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists'. This concept has been much discussed by other feminist scholars researching sexual violence. Jones (2012: 195), for example, echoes some of the arguments made in the just world hypothesis by suggesting that:

Rape myths function to give people a false perception of the reality of sexual violence. They may operate in providing women with a false sense of security by minimising or denying the extent of sexual violence. Such myths are comforting to believe because individual women can reassure themselves that they are safe from rape: 'I would never walk in the dark, wear those clothes, or drink too much'. Myths often work by blaming the victim and making excuses for the perpetrator

Belief in these myths means that, when women do disclose and report sexual violence, their credibility is questioned (Jones, 2012).

Rape myths have been critiqued by some researchers. For example, undertaking a review of literature on rape myths in 1994, Lonsway and Fitzgerald argue that definitions (such as the one offered by Burt, as well as those offered by further research) are too descriptive, and not sufficiently articulated (1994: 134). They suggest that 'researchers have generally failed to develop a thorough, theoretically based definition of rape myths and in addition, have failed to use any definition consistently', and that this has led to the use of widely varying measures of rape myth acceptance (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994: 134). In particular, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994: 134) take issue with the phrase 'myth', suggesting that rape myths are actually 'best conceptualised as stereotypes'. They therefore expand upon Burt's definition

of rape myths to offer a more concrete definition: 'rape myths are attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women' (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994: 134). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994: 135) therefore argue that

The truth value of any of these statements in a particular situation is not as significant as the fact that they tend to be universally applied, as echoed in jury verdicts, public policy decisions, and personal reacts to survivors of sexual violence. Attitudes about, and actions taken toward individuals based on any stereotype about a group are generally unjustified and their importance lies in their direct or indirect translation into socially undesirable attitudes and actions

For Lonsway and Fitzgerald then, the focus is on how such myths and stereotypes are held and applied.

Reece (2013: 447) has argued that the term rape myths is overused, and that we risk 'creating myths about myths'. Reece (2013) compares the low conviction rates for rape with other crimes, including burglary, suggesting that they are therefore not of concern, and critiques a number of myths, including 'real rape', 'women cry rape' and 'coffee as consent', citing a supposed lack of evidence for support in these myths. Reece's argument has been criticised by those researching rape, such as Barbara Krahe. Krahe (2013: 2) suggests that Reece 'presents a distorted comparison of rape with other offences, misrepresents findings from research on rape myth acceptance, and displays a complete lack of understanding of the methodological requirements' of measuring rape myth acceptance. Similarly, Conaghan and Russell (2014: 26) acknowledge that Reece raises important questions about feminist research on sexual violence and 'compels us to reassess the theoretical frames we deploy and the assumptions that underpin them'. However, they go on to suggest that what lies at the heart of Reece's argument is actually 'a resolve to free rape discourse from the tentacles of perceived political correctness, to dislodge it from the hegemonic grip of a regime of permissible and impermissible views prescribed and patrolled by feminist researchers and policy makers' (Conaghan and Russell, 2013: 27). Like Krahe, Conaghan and Russell contest Reece's understanding of sexual violence research, and suggest her argument is selective.

Therefore, despite the critiques outlined above, it is not felt that these are strong enough to stop using the term rape myths, especially given how widely it is used and understood by not only academics and practitioners, but also by the general public.

'Rape culture' is linked to rape myths and victim-blaming. Brownmiller (1975) used the term 'rape-supportive culture', whilst Herman (in Freeman, 1984: 52) wrote that 'our society is a rape culture because it fosters and encourages rape by teaching males and females that it is natural and normal for sexual relations to involve aggressive behaviour on the part of males'. The definition has since grown. For example, Powell and Henry (2014: 2) draw upon other definitions to suggest that rape culture is the 'social, cultural and structural discourses and practices in which sexual violence is tolerated, accepted, eroticised, minimised and trivialised'. Within such a culture, then, violence against women is 'eroticised in literary, cinematic and media representations; victims are routinely disbelieved or blamed for their own victimisation and perpetrators are rarely held accountable or their behaviours are seen as excusable or understandable' (Powell and Henry, 2014: 2). Powell and Henry (2014: 2) argue that these beliefs are part of a broader gender inequality, and are manifested in the language, laws and institutions that are supposed to challenge and prevent sexual violence, but instead 'perpetuate, support, condone or reflect' such values.

Examples of rape myths include ideas around women's behaviour, including a victim being responsible, alcohol consumption, resisting rape, lying about rape, clothing or appearance, relationship status, time to report rape and sexual history (Burt, 1980; Jordan, 2004a; Newcombe et al., 2008; Payne et al., 1990; Gerger et al., 2007; Temkin, 2010). There is also the 'real rape' stereotype (Estrich, 1987), which 'is not only *descriptive*, specifying the characteristics of a typical rape, but *prescriptive* in that all too often it lays down the criteria a case must meet in order to be judged to qualify as rape' (Temkin and Krahé, 2008: 32, original emphasis). The more a rape differs from 'real rape' (for example, not being committed by a stranger), the less likely people are to consider it rape, and the more likely victims are to be blamed (Burt and Albin, 1981). Research exploring how common beliefs in these myths will be discussed next.

### *2.3.2.1 - Belief in Rape Myths*

Rape myth acceptance scales have been developed to assess the prevalence of belief in rape myths, such as the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt, 1980), the Attitudes Towards Rape scale (Feild, 1978) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Payne et al., 1990), and the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression (Gerger et al., 2007). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) offer an analysis of different scales that had been developed at the time of writing, and suggest that they share a conceptual similarity with either Burt or Feild's offerings. In a review of studies on rape myths published between 1997 and 2007, Suarez and Gadalla (2010) found that, of the 37 studies that fit within their search criteria, 74% used Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS), and 16% use Payne et al.'s Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS). 63% of the studies used student populations, 30% studied the general population and 16% used specific populations, such as the police or therapists (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010: 2018). This suggests that there may be an overreliance on student populations to study the acceptance of rape myths. As well as this, Temkin and Krahé point out that most studies on rape myths, in addition to researching student populations, are conducted in the United States (2008: 35).

Overall, reviews of research on rape myth acceptance have highlighted that research tends to find a difference between genders when studying rape myth acceptance, with men consistently showing a higher acceptance of rape myths (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010; Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994; Temkin and Krahé, 2008). For example, Giacomassi and Dull (1986: 6) found that, regardless of race, women were more likely than men to reject the belief that women often make false accusations of rape, that women fantasise about rape and that victims of rape are often a little to blame, whilst also being more likely than men to agree that normal men commit rape. Newcombe et al. (2008: 1742-1743) found that 63% of men, versus 42% of women were identified as 'high rape myth acceptors'. Belief in traditional gender roles has also been found to be significant in rape myth acceptance (Burt, 1980), and acceptance of interpersonal violence has been found to have a negative impact on the desire to convict a rapist (Burt and Albin, 1981). The relationship between victim and perpetrator has also been

demonstrated to be significant in rape myth acceptance (for example, Viki et al. 2004; Newcombe et al., 2008) For example, Newcombe et al. (2008) found that men tended to minimise the violence more than women did, and this increased as the relationship became more familiar between the victim and perpetrator.

Public opinion surveys have also been used to show the prevalence of rape myths. For example, research commissioned by a Sexual Assault Referral Centre found high levels of rape myth acceptance for some myths; 53% of the 1061 people surveyed felt that there were circumstances when the victim should take some responsibility for sexual violence (Opinion Matters/The Havens, 2010: 9). These circumstances included when performing a sexual act (73%), getting into bed with someone (66%), drinking to excess (64%), dressing provocatively (29%) and dancing with a man in a club (22%) (Opinion Matters/The Havens, 2010). 18% of the sample felt that most rape claims were probably untrue, with 27% of men and 14% of women agreeing with this statement (Opinion Matters/The Havens, 2010: 8). Similarly, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey found that 23% agreed or agreed strongly that women often lie about rape, although just over a third disagreed or strongly disagreed (Reid, 2015: 23), whilst a survey conducted by Amnesty International found that 30% would hold the victim at least partially responsible if she had been drunk, and 8% would consider her at least partially responsible if she had had many sexual partners (Amnesty International/ICM: 2005). In a repeat of a 1977 survey on attitudes towards rape, Brown et al. (2010b) found that there had been a decline in belief in rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes; in 1977 34% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that if a woman is raped, it is usually her fault, whilst only 15% felt this way in 2010. In 1977, 42% of respondents thought that a woman's sexual history should be taken into account when punishing those found guilty of rape, but in 2010, this stood at 19% (Brown et al., 2010b: 5). Whilst these numbers show significant and promising decreases in victim-blaming beliefs, it still stands that a substantial minority of the population hold such views.

The figures highlighted here show that, in some cases, it is a minority who believe in rape myths and hold victim-blaming attitudes. However, these are significant minorities, and, as

will be discussed next, feed into blaming attitudes found in institutions and the criminal justice system.

### *2.3.2.2 - Prevalence in the Criminal Justice System*

As highlighted above, there are significant numbers of the population that agree with some rape myths. This is concerning in its own right but is even more so when considering the prevalence of these beliefs within aspects of our criminal justice system. Temkin (2010: 710) has suggested that, despite a 'golden age of law reform in relation to sexual offences' in England and Wales since the 1970s, the low conviction rate for rape remains, and one reason for this is 'the power and destructive force of rape myths'.

Police acceptance of rape myths has been explored by research. For example, studying male police officers in South Korea's attitudes to women and rape myths, Lee et al. (2011) found that those who had stronger beliefs in rape myths were more likely to endorse rape-supportive attributions in rape, such as being reluctant to identify certain situations as rape. Sleath and Bull (2012) found that police officers' acceptance of rape myths significantly predicted victim-blaming, and they highlight that this has serious implications for how police officers are handling rape cases. Whilst Sleath and Bull (2012: 659) found low rape myth acceptance for some myths, they also found that 40% of male and 34% of female officers accepted the myth that many victims had actually 'changed their mind' about consensual sex, and the authors recognise this issue as being problematic in the police's treatment of rape cases. Jordan (2004b) found a number of factors impacted police views of how 'credible' a victim of rape was, including if she was intoxicated, delayed reporting or had previously had consensual sex with the perpetrator, relying on a number of myths about rape itself, and how victims of rape should behave.

Mock trials have also been used to examine members of the jury's beliefs in rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes. Temkin and Krahe (2008: 70) suggest that the impact of beliefs people hold about rape is 'clearly present in jury decision-making', and this is reflected in

research findings. In a systematic review of nine studies on rape myths and mock juries, Dinos et al. (2015) found that eight either fully or partially supported the hypothesis that rape myths affect jury members' decisions, with those holding rape myths more likely to find defendants not guilty. Meanwhile, Sinclair and Bourne (1998) suggest that jurors' beliefs are cyclical; not only do jurors hold stereotypical beliefs about rape, they reinforce these beliefs. Rape myths are therefore, they argue, strengthened by not guilty verdicts (Sinclair and Bourne, 1998). Research has highlighted that alcohol and substance use affects jurors' opinions in rape trials, with the victim's consumption of alcohol or other substances negatively impacting how credible the jury perceives them to be (Wenger and Bornstein, 2006; Wall and Schuller, 2000; Schuller and Wall, 1998; Ellison and Munro, 2009). Sexual history has also been found to play a role in jurors' opinions, as has the victim's relationship with the perpetrator. Schuller and Hastings (2002) found in their mock jury study that those who heard evidence of the victim's sexual history with the defendant were more likely to blame her, and believe she consented. Ideas around how victims should respond to rape have also been shown to influence jurors' opinions and decisions, including physical resistance and how long the victim took to report the rape (Ellison and Munro, 2008), as well as how victims behave in the courtroom (Weir and Wrightsman, 1990).

Research has also demonstrated that defence barristers draw upon rape myths to undermine the credibility, blame and to make a victim appear unworthy of protection of the law (Temkin et al., 2016), but also that prosecution barristers may draw upon such myths to support their arguments (Smith, 2018). Smith (2018) found that rape myths were resisted in many of the 18 rape trials that she observed, including through comments by the prosecution barristers. However, at times, this resistance was 'very weak and sometimes continued to cast doubt on the survivor', using the example of a judge's warning that victims do not need to appear upset in order to be telling the truth also containing a warning that if she was upset, this did not guarantee that she was being truthful (Smith, 2018: 61). Smith (2018: 61) therefore argues that 'even when resisting myths, then, barristers maintained an idea of survivors being 'other''. In the trials she observed, 'rape myths were therefore routinely discussed and used to oversimplify the events in question' (Smith, 2018: 85).

However, Smith and Skinner (2012: 18) have suggested that 'it would be easy to blame juries for believing such rape myths', as court cases focus on 'peripheral details that may cause jurors to consider issues they otherwise would not', and that legal personnel have the power to indicate to jurors what is and is not important in rape trials. They suggest that training legal personnel about rape myths could be a solution, but, as highlighted above, that barristers use rape myths even when they know the myths are false in a desire to win the case (Smith and Skinner, 2012: 19). It is therefore important to note that, whilst rape myths are undoubtedly important in court cases, this is in combination with a criminal justice system which is adversarial for victim-survivors of rape.

## **2.4 - Summary**

The above literature has demonstrated that a feminist understanding of men's violence against women is essential for understanding rape, and how the criminal justice system mistreats and mishandles cases of sexual violence. Research has also shown that rape myths and victim-blaming beliefs are prevalent in many members of society and the criminal justice system. Therefore, whilst there are some valid criticisms of the term rape myths, it remains a useful term due to the wealth of research utilising the concept, and because the concept has reached outside of academia and into the general public's awareness.

## Chapter 3 – News Media

This chapter will explore research around the media, with a particular focus on news media. It will begin with an exploration of media effects theory, before discussing news media. It will then look at presentations of crime in the media, before looking at the presentation of other social issues. It explores the use of media guidelines in the coverage of suicide, before finishing by looking at the limited literature available on the consequences of media on victim-survivors.

### 3.1 – Feminist Engagement with Media Theory

There are a number of theories regarding media, and it is not possible to explore them all within the scope of this literature review. However, a brief overview, including some of the critiques of, media effects theory as it relates to feminist work, will be explored here.

Effects research generally uses experiments to investigate the relationship between viewing media and doing something, particularly violence, with researchers interested in the link between representations in the media and how we behave or think (Boyle, 2005: 16). Research into effects has therefore often used experiments to explore this link, including Bandura's (Bandura et al., 1961; Bandura, 1965) Bobo doll experiments. Much research has been conducted on exploring the effects of media, and, despite this, it remains a highly contested area, with 'notoriously inconclusive' results (Boyle, 2005: 15). Gender has been neglected by effects research, with many studies focusing on men, although gender-neutral terms (such as 'viewers') may hide this (Boyle, 2000). Boyle (2000) criticises effects research on a number of grounds, including ethical concerns around participants not being told about the subject matter ahead of the experiment (a particular concern in the studies of violence against women), and presuming definitions of violence are commonly held, meaning that studies often include little information about the *contents* of the media shown to participants. As well as this, effects research rarely differentiates between forms of media (Boyle, 2000),

and Boyle draws upon the difference between pornography (showing real sexual acts) and mainstream media (showing simulated sexual acts) to illustrate the difference between forms of media, writing that 'with this in mind, do we really know what effects researchers are exploring the effects of?' (2000: 189, original emphasis).

With the above in mind, it is not surprising that feminists have therefore developed distinct ways of examining the relationship between media and violence. For example, in their research *Women Viewing Violence*, Schlesinger et al. (1992: 3) suggest that, instead of starting from the question of what a media 'effect' is, they instead asked 'what do women *make* of the violence that they see in the media?' (original emphasis). Therefore, the question instead seeks to explore 'what representations of violence against women *mean* in [women's] in their lives' (Schlesinger et al., 1992: 3). This approach therefore focuses much more closely on the experiences of women, putting this at the centre of the research.

Using a different approach, Kitzinger (2000; 2004) has used the idea of media 'templates' to explain how people use frames from the media as a reference point. Kitzinger (2004: 72) therefore argues that media templates are 'key events that have an ongoing shelf life which extends beyond the conclusion of news happenings', with many defined by their retrospective use in the reporting of other events. They are therefore used to 'explain current events, as a point of comparison and, often, as proof of an ongoing problem' (Kitzinger, 2004: 72). In the process of an event becoming a media template, it is simplified, has minimal opportunity for alternative readings, and the meaning of the template may be both reinforced and altered, whilst also being open to challenging by personal experiences or political perspectives (Kitzinger, 2004: 73). Media templates are, then, 'a crucial site of media power, acting to provide context for new events, serving as foci for demands for policy change and helping to shape the ways in which we make sense of the world' (Kitzinger, 2000: 81). Kitzinger's argument of templates is not as causal as much of the media effects literature, and it offers an explanation that can be utilised for how people *draw upon* the media in their understandings of events and violence, rather than the more simplistic idea of being directly affected by media, sometimes called the 'hypodermic syringe model' (Jewkes, 2011: 13).

Whilst no definitive conclusion about media effects can be reached, we cannot rule out that the media does impact us. Boyle (2005: 16), for example, suggests that ‘justifiable scepticism about the effects literature should not lead us to dismiss the question of media influence altogether’, and that research has demonstrated the *influence* of media. More sophisticated research is therefore needed to better understand the relationship between media and its impact upon us, and research doing so needs to include the experiences of women.

### **3.2 - News media**

Researching television news bulletins, the Glasgow Media Group suggested that ‘contrary to the claims, conventions and culture of television journalism, the news is not a neutral product’ (1976: 1). Whilst this particular research was on television news (chosen as previous work had highlighted that audiences felt this format was more trustworthy than radio news and newspapers), the idea of lack of neutrality can be applied to all forms of news, including print news media. This is echoed by Jewkes (2011: 41), who argues that, no matter which media theory we adhere to, ‘we have to conclude that media images are *not* reality; they are a *version* of reality’ (original emphasis), which is shaped by production processes, agenda setting and editing. Eldridge (1995: 27) argues that the ‘processes of creating, transmitting and receiving messages are not just a secondary feature’ of modern society, but are part of the foundation of society. Therefore, ‘what takes place in and through these process is...not simply a comment on social reality but part of it’ (Eldridge, 1995: 28). News media is key within our understandings of events in modern society, and, it is arguable, the two cannot be unlinked.

Research has also highlighted that media coverage has issues around presentations of other aspects of identity, such as race (van Dijk in Wodak, 1987; van Dijk in Paletz, 1995; chapters in Glasgow Media Group, 1999), disability (Glasgow Media Group, 2011) and gender more broadly (Gill, 2007; Gauntlett, 2008; Collins, 2011) are problematic. Whilst to examine all of these in detail is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge they exist,

and that, as discussed within feminist theory earlier, they are likely to be intersectional and interact with each other.

It is also worth noting that what we mean by 'media' has undergone a massive growth, with the rise of new media meaning we now consume news online, where there is also a strong element of user-generated content (Jewkes, 2011: 65). Gauntlett (2008: 1) argues that 'media and communications are a central element of modern life' and suggests that the development of new types of media is becoming characterised by a user or participant relationship, rather than being an audience member, as seen previously with more traditional media forms. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009: 563) suggest that the internet has 'expanded and institutionalised as an alternative for the production and consumption of news', whilst Salter (2013: 228) reports that there are arguments that the growth in new media 'has resulted in a re-democratisation of information production, dissemination and exchange'. Despite this, Jewkes (2011: 68) suggests that online media 'replicates the dominance of established media organisations', pointing to the popularity of the websites of the *BBC*, *Guardian* and *Sun*, amongst others. It is therefore expected that the issues around traditional print news discussed here also apply to online print news.

### 3.2.1 - Crime News

Davies, Francis and Greer (2007: 8) suggest that 'while the media do not necessarily tell us what to think, they can tell us what to think about' and argue the media is key when considering the construction of crime and crime victims. It is no surprise then that criminologists have devoted much attention to news media and its portrayal of crime. Jewkes (2011: 10), for example, argues that for many, it is common sense that society is characterised increasingly by crime since the advent of the mass media, which has resulted in a 'persistent mythology that the two phenomena are 'naturally' linked'. This reporting has also led to a 'fear of crime', as 'the mass media now provide us with round the clock news of crisis, disaster and trauma' (Carrabine, 2008: 39). Chibnall (1977: xi) suggests that crime news means that 'people no longer need to gather together to witness punishments', with crime news stories featuring heroes and villains who personify good and evil, whilst Carrabine (2008: 2) argues

that ‘there is little doubt’ that the mass media is selective in which crimes, criminals and circumstances they choose to report on.

Jewkes (2011: 42) therefore builds on previous work (such as Chibnall, 1977), and identifies twelve news values – ‘the value judgements that journalists and editors make about the *public appeal* of a story and also whether it is in the public interest’ (original emphasis) – for the new millennium that can be applied to UK news media, particularly crime. These are: threshold (meeting a certain level of perceived importance or drama to be considered newsworthy); predictability (which allows organisations to plan coverage in advance); simplification (reducible to a minimum number of parts or themes); individualism (connecting simplification and risk, this highlights individual and personalised stories over cultural explanations); risk (for example, an ongoing narrative about an offender ‘at large’); sex (including crimes of sexual violence); celebrity or high-status persons (a significantly lower level of deviance is required to be reported if it involves a well-known name); proximity (both spatially and culturally); violence or conflict (which fulfils media desire to present dramatic events in a graphic manner); visual spectacle or graphic imagery (which can be used alongside media reports to demonstrate the ‘truth’ of a story); children (whether as victims or offenders, although victims allow for ‘morality campaigns’), and; conservative ideology or political diversion (particularly if complying with a broadly right-wing consensus) (Jewkes, 2011: 45-64). Crime stories do not have to meet all the criteria to be newsworthy, but those that score more highly are more likely to be reported (Jewkes, 2011: 44). Jewkes (2011: 44) notes that different news media organisations will likely have different values (for example, how news is reported in tabloid versus broadsheet newspapers), and that news values are also not static, and will change over time.

### **3.3 - News Media Presentations of Violence Against Women**

As explored above, and argued by Kitzinger (2009: 74), the media are a ‘crucial resource’ in constructing the world around us, so the role of the media in understanding sexual violence as a social problem is significant. Likewise, Carll (2003: 1607) has suggested that news

coverage 'represents windows into the community and the world', calling it 'imperative' that news reports about violence against women are reported accurately and without bias. Taylor (2009: 24) meanwhile calls the media a 'particularly harsh source of' victim-blaming. Writing about cases of sexual violence committed by footballers, Waterhouse-Watson (2012: 55) has argued that, as so few cases reach a legal judgment, print media 'play an important role in shaping public perceptions of footballer rape cases, and rape in general'.

A key text in understanding reporting of sexual violence in a UK context is Soothill and Walby's 1991 *Sex Crime in the News*. Soothill and Walby sampled newspapers for stories about rape and sexual violence in 1951, 1961, 1971, 1978 and 1985 to determine not only the nature of reporting, but how this reporting had changed over time (1991: 14). They included papers such as the *Daily Mirror*, *The Times*, *the News of The World* and the *London Evening Standard*, included local and Sunday publications and added more newspapers (such as the *Sun* and the *Guardian*) to the sample as these emerged (1991: 16). Soothill and Walby (1991: 3) argue that whilst there has been a major increase in the amount of coverage of rape and sexual violence since the beginning of their sample, these reports are often 'sensationalist and titillating, rather than serious accounts' of the crimes that have occurred. They summarise the problems with the reporting of sexual violence into four headings: seeking the sensational (the creation of a 'sex beast'), producing a cascade effect (by which everyone remotely linked with the case becomes the focus of media coverage), embracing a narrow definition of sex crime (i.e. when a woman is raped by a stranger being the only 'real' rape), and information and explanation (lack of coverage of expert work) (Soothill and Walby, 1991: 146-148). Overall, Soothill and Walby argue (1991: 157) that press reporting 'obscures' the real nature of sexual violence, underestimating the extent of such crimes and by reporting on unusual cases.

### 3.3.1 - Acts of Violence Against Women

Soothill and Walby (1991: 36) wrote almost thirty years ago that the media are 'very loath to consider that sex crime may be related to men and women's position in society', and this finding has been echoed by others (Benedict, 1992; Pepin, 2016; Kitzinger, 2009), with a lack of framing of violence against women as a social problem. Berns (2004: 38) has argued that

media representation distorts images of crime and violence, and that people ‘understand social problems through their experiences’. However, she found that those without these first-hand experiences were ‘more likely to use the media as a main source of information’ (Berns, 2004: 38). It is therefore key that sexual violence and violence against women is recognised as linked to gender inequality: otherwise the media is failing to connect the ‘dots’ between acts of violence (Westmarland, 2015). As well as this, the media is inaccurate in choosing which *types* of sexual violence it will report on, with an overrepresentation of rapes committed by a stranger or ‘unusual’ cases of violence against women (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Meyers, 1997; Carter, 1998; Greer, 2003; Braber, 2014). Coverage of cases of sexual violence committed against children has also been shown to be inaccurate. For example, teenage girls are still blamed for the abuse perpetrated against them (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Boyle, 2018) and strangers as perpetrators is over-reported (Kitzinger, 2004).

Violence (and the impact of this violence) has also been found to be minimised in news coverage, with domestic violence rarely named accurately (Pepin, 2016; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017; Gillespie et al., 2013; Richards et al., 2014). This is also true of sexual violence (Meyer, 2010; Harrington, 2016; Boyle, 2018, Waterhouse-Watson, 2018), or, when accurate naming is used, being used in such a way that it hides the perpetrator of the violence (Taylor, 2009; Bonnes, 2013; Waterhouse-Watson, 2013; Braber, 2014). Pepin (2016: 130) found language such as ‘argument, dispute, altercation or incident’, alongside qualifiers such as ‘escalated, elevated and heated’, to describe cases of domestic violence. More than 50% of the articles in Pepin’s (2016) sample minimised the seriousness of the violence, whilst fewer than 20% reported the consequences of perpetrator’s behaviour, such as criminal charges.

### 3.3.2 - Victims

Berns (2004: 3) found that media representations of domestic violence focus on the victim, where she is often either praised for having the courage to leave her abuser or is blamed for staying and ‘allowing’ the abuse to continue. By focusing on the victim, Berns (2004: 3) argues that we have lost sight of perpetrators of domestic violence, as well as the social conditions that tolerate and encourage domestic violence. This framing around the behaviours of the

victims of domestic violence is significant as ‘how a problem is framed suggests a solution to the problem’ (Berns, 2004: 8). Thus, if a problem is framed around victims, so is the solution. The responsibility for ending the violence is therefore placed on the victim, not the perpetrator.

O’Hara (2012: 252), examining coverage of the repeated rape of an 11-year-old girl by a group of men in a town in Texas, found that ‘most of the articles do not address the harm done to the victim’, and instead focused on the how the town or the families of the perpetrators were affected. 28% of articles discussed the effect on the town community, whilst only 16% discussed the harm towards the victim (O’Hara, 2012: 252). O’Hara (2012: 253) acknowledges that journalists could not interview the girl but suggests they could interview professionals to discuss the consequences of sexual violence and that, by choosing not to do so, ‘they made light of the rape’.

Coverage has also been shown to focus on and blame the behaviours of victims of sexual and domestic violence, including factors such as alcohol consumption (Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997; Taylor, 2009; O’Hara, 2012; Rothman et al., 2012; Bonnes, 2013; Gillespie et al., 2013; Richards et al., 2011; Meyer, 2010; Lees, 1995). In a case with a perpetrator who was thought to have drugged and raped at least ten women, 59% of articles mentioned the women had had a drink, 27% mentioned alcohol, 24% said the victims had ‘blacked out’ (either from drinking or having been drugged), 15% called them ‘intoxicated’ and 5% called them ‘drunk’ (O’Hara, 2012: 255). Pepin (2016) refers to this focus on the victim as ‘misplaced responsibility’, with 13% of articles in her sample blaming the victim. She found that articles did this by claiming the victim was lying or was the primary aggressor (Pepin, 2016).

Similarly, Lloyd and Ramon (2017: 122) found that the most common theme within their research on coverage of domestic violence in the *Sun* and *Guardian* ‘relates to how women are held accountable for the domestic violence they experience’, and found this blaming was both direct and indirect, including when women had had affairs, a finding echoed by Taylor

(2009) and Richards et al. (2011). Meyer (2010) examined coverage of rape in the *Daily Mail*, finding that it often discussed excessive alcohol consumption. She found that 'if being part of the drinking culture becomes the equivalent to consenting to sex, then women are effectively held accountable for rape involving alcohol' (Meyer, 2010: 23), and that the *Daily Mail* did not take rape involving alcohol seriously, instead trivialising it. Attacks on the character of the victim have also been found. Taylor (2009), for example, found that irrelevant information was included in coverage of femicides, such as having spent large amounts of money, or having become pregnant at a young age.

Waterhouse-Watson (2013) has written about how the victims of sexual violence committed by Australian footballers are presented, and suggests that there are five 'characters' that these women are presented as: predatory women (those who 'hunt' footballers for sex, and is always sexually available), groupies (a sexually available football fan), gold diggers (who make false complaints of rape for money), women scorned (who makes a false complaint for revenge) and party girls (who go out drinking and looking for sex). These characters 'can replace that of the Raped Woman in narratives of the cases, and therefore discredit rape complainants' (Waterhouse-Watson, 2013: 20). These stereotypes and characters are 'so embedded...that they can also be evoked regardless of whether a writer consciously and/or explicitly incorporates them' into narratives, nor do they require the victim to actually display any of the characteristics associated with the stereotypes (Waterhouse-Watson, 2013: 20).

Victims in the media are not only blamed for their actions, but also their *inaction* of not leaving, standing up to the abuser or having reported the abuse (Berns, 2004; Taylor, 2009; Braber, 2014; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017), particularly in cases of domestic violence where children were involved. This was used to demonstrate that the violence must not have been serious (Taylor, 2009). Richards et al. (2011: 189) found that 110 articles (forming 11% of their sample) directly blamed the victim of femicide in this way either by suggesting they had not taken appropriate measures to protect themselves by not reporting, filing or pressing charges, not showing up to court dates or not leaving the abuse. This was done through use of quotes from friends and family, police officers and judges (Richards et al., 2011).

Research has also found that such reporting of violence against women is sexualised (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Braber, 2014; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017). Lloyd and Ramon (2017) use the example of the *Sun* publishing a photo of Reeva Steenkamp in a bikini on their front page the day after Oscar Pistorius shot and killed her, as well as staged photos of domestic violence with bruised and semi-clad actresses. Also looking at coverage in the *Sun*, Braber (2014: 99) found references to a woman who was murdered and her body burned beyond recognition by her partner as 'Playboy girl', 'stripper' and 'Playboy model'. Soothill and Walby (1991: 3) suggest that reporting is 'sensationalist and titillating', squeezing 'all manner of sexual detail' into stories, including the victim's sexual history. They explored how women are portrayed as 'temptresses', including victims who were below the age of consent, with language such as 'Lolita', 'saucy schoolgirl', and 'girl gave rapist a sex lesson' used (Soothill and Walby, 1991: 82). Within these reports, then, 'it's the women who are the problem' (Soothill and Walby, 1991: 83). This sexualisation and blaming of victims led Benedict (1992: 18) to argue that women who have been raped are presented as either virgins ('pure and innocent, a true victim attacked by monsters') or vamps ('a wanton female who provoked the assailant with her sexuality'). Whilst the work of Soothill and Walby and Benedict was published almost 30 years ago, work such as that by Lloyd and Ramon (2017) and Braber (2014) highlights that the issue of victim-survivors being sexualised is an ongoing concern.

The above highlights that there are 'ideal' victims and that there are undeserving victims (Lloyd and Ramon, 2017: 126; see also, Meyers, 1997), and how victims can be 'othered' if they do not fit the criteria of being a 'good' victim (Kitzinger, 2009). In research on television news, Meyers (1997: 57) found that those who were showed as undeserving of violence 'were either very young or very old, had been tortured or murdered in a particularly gruesome manner, or had been attacked' by a serial perpetrator or someone seen as mentally ill. If none of these criteria were met, then 'chances are she will be represented as somehow responsible for her own suffering' (Meyers, 1997: 61). Such victim-blaming continues to be a concern in news coverage of violence against women, with women blamed for their experiences of

domestic violence (for example, Berns, 2004; Taylor, 2009; Richards et al., 2011) and sexual violence (for example, O'Hara, 2012; Waterhouse-Watson, 2013; Meyer, 2010).

### 3.3.3 - Perpetrators

Language used to refer to rapists has been found to make them appear as monsters or animals (O'Hara, 2012; Soothill and Walby, 1991; Greer, 2003; Kitzinger, 2004; Kitzinger, 2009; Braber, 2014). Soothill and Walby (1991) found that a key part of newspaper coverage of sexual violence is the construction of the 'sex fiend' or 'sex beast', and this often uses phrases such as 'sex pest', 'sex beast', 'pervert'. This construction works on the idea that the rape has been committed by a stranger, therefore not representing the reality of most cases. Within this, 'the man is an animal who must be trapped and caught' (Soothill and Walby, 1991: 146). Similarly, O'Hara (2012: 251) found language such as 'predator', 'preying' on victims, 'freak', 'monster', 'devil', 'stalk' and 'beast' in two of the cases she examined, and Braber (2014) found language such as 'one evil monster', 'brute', 'depraved monster' and 'sadistic'. Language such as this serves to 'other' the perpetrator, and make them appear to be sub-human, suggesting that those who commit acts of sexual violence are not like normal men. For example, Kitzinger (2004: 125) argues that the media tends to present perpetrators of sexual violence as 'very different from other men, and often imply they are easily identifiable'. Greer (2003: 81) found that photographs were used to echo this imagery, with rapists presented as "dishevelled' and 'dirty' and who seemed to have 'wild' and 'staring' eyes'.

Research has also found that the media excuses perpetrators. For example, in one of the cases O'Hara (2012) examined, the rapist, Ryan Liddell, was a survivor of the Dunblane school shootings, and she found that some articles used this to create sympathy for him. Of the four articles who used 'victim' in the headline in this case, three used this to refer to Liddell, instead of the 76-year-old woman he abused (O'Hara, 2012: 251). In articles that discussed the trauma of both Liddell and his victim, 82% discussed the Dunblane shooting before stating what had happened to Liddell's victim (O'Hara, 2012: 251). Only 24% of the articles discussed the victim's suffering without mentioning Liddell's background. Pepin (2016: 129) found that in cases where a celebrity male committed domestic violence, media articles 'effectively

sanctioned men's violence against women and rarely presented it as a social problem'. Braber (2014: 97) found that many articles in the *Sun* and *Guardian* mention issues 'that can be seen to reduce the blame of the male perpetrator', including football results and alcohol.

Language such as 'jilted' and 'spurned' was used to describe perpetrators of domestic violence (Lloyd and Ramon, 2017), and this is seen to justify the abuse committed by men. Lloyd and Ramon (2017: 125) suggest that this language 'engenders a clear division between maligned and maligner, absolution and culpability'. Similarly, language was used to describe perpetrators of domestic violence as having 'snapped' or 'lost control' (Meyers, 1997; Rothman et al., 2012; Richards et al., 2014), or emotional, financial and mental stresses in their lives (Taylor, 2009; Gillespie et al., 2013). Taylor (2009: 41) also found that, in cases of femicide where the victim had been physically or mentally ill, the perpetrator was seen as 'quasi-heroic...for enduring the burden of her illness for such a long time', a finding echoed by Richards et al. (2014).

Research has also demonstrated the media excuses men who commit domestic abuse against their partners by describing them in positive ways. This has been shown, for example, by focusing on their role as fathers (Taylor, 2009; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017). This includes describing the perpetrator as 'doting', 'devoted' or as family men (Lloyd and Ramon, 2017: 122-123). Similarly, positive descriptions such as 'hard working' or 'well-respected' were used (Taylor, 2009) to describe perpetrators. Taylor (2009) found coverage describing how much a police officer loved the wife he had killed. Waterhouse-Watson (2016b) similarly found articles referring to the emotions of the perpetrator or his partner during the rape trial of an Australian footballer, relying on the idea that he was a good person, with the case causing emotional distress for him.

Whilst substance and alcohol use was seen to blame victims of rape and domestic violence, Pepin (2016: 135) found that substance use by celebrity perpetrators was 'typically described in medicalised terms', used to create sympathy for the perpetrator and distract from their

issue of committing violence against women. However, as discussed later, this was racialized – substance and drug use was seven times more likely to be present (and consequently excuse perpetrators) in stories of white celebrities than black celebrities (Pepin, 2016: 136). Similarly, in the case where the perpetrator raped multiple women and was suspected of drugging them to do so, he was referred to as ‘the ‘Chemical Cassanova’’ (O’Hara, 2012: 255). Articles in this case focused on the possible use of drugs, doing so at the expense of the issue of consent (O’Hara, 2012).

### 3.3.4 - False Allegations

As discussed in the previous chapter, false allegations of rape are often thought to be high by police, and it is a common myth that women lie about being raped. Media coverage of false allegations is therefore also key. Jordan (2004a: 5) suggests that media reporting of false allegations of rape (or those that are believed to be false) ‘has become a fashionable area of inquiry and speculation in recent years’, with extensive coverage and more emphasis on these stories than those where a rapist is found guilty. Kelly (2010: 1349) argues that the ‘spectre invoked by media and politicians of large numbers of men being falsely accused and suffering the ignominy of public exposure’ is not borne out by data, as demonstrated earlier. Kitzinger (2009: 82) meanwhile argues that the rise and nature of media attention to false allegations speaks ‘volumes about gendered power and media practices’.

Jordan (2004a: 5) links coverage of false accusations to a shift in the reporting of perpetrators; with more of a focus on ‘ordinary’ instead of ‘beasts’, ‘it is scarcely surprising that vigorous campaigns of resistance will be mounted to, yet again, undermine women’s accusations concerning men’s violence’. This has led to the championing of a new victim – the falsely accused man, including when men are found not guilty of rape (Jordan, 2004a; Gavey and Gow, 2001; Lees, 1995; Benedict, 1992).

Gavey and Gow (2001) examined a particular article published in a New Zealand magazine, which purported that more women in Zealand were making false accusations of rape,

alongside media coverage over five years, from 1995-1999. Gavey and Gow (2001: 342) ultimately argue that such coverage 'can function to reproduce rape-supportive myths of women's propensity to lie about rape'. Whilst the magazine piece initially presents itself as balanced and impartial, Gavey and Gow (2001) deconstruct this balance, including by examining the title of the magazine article – 'Cry Wolf' – which leaves little room to argue that the high numbers of 'false allegations' are down to police recording and counting instead of malicious women. The phrase 'cry wolf' is synonymous with attention-seeking, implying that women who make so-called false allegations are doing so for attention, and are abusing a system which trusts them (Gavey and Gow, 2001). The article also relied on the idea that feminism's influence on the criminal justice system had gone too far, with police seen as 'under [it's] spell' (Gavey and Gow, 2001: 353).

As well as the above, Meyer (2010) found that, in the UK, the *Daily Mail* did not see rape where the victim had been drinking as 'proper' rape, with one columnist suggesting that binge drinking culture was another reason that women 'cry rape', due to shame, embarrassment or regret of their actions whilst drunk. Rape, and false allegations of rape, are therefore framed as a problem of female binge drinking rather than men's violence (Meyer, 2010).

Media coverage of false accusations therefore helps to perpetuate the myth that women lie about having been raped, and that the men who have been so-called falsely accused are the real victims in such cases.

### 3.3.5 - Celebrity and High-Profile Perpetrators

Some cases of violence against women become high-profile, receiving significant media attention during their span. This can include when celebrities are involved (echoing the news values offered by Jewkes), but also includes other cases. Braber (2014) found that cases of domestic violence involving celebrities were reported more than cases involving non-celebrities. Research on such cases, where it has not already been drawn upon above, will be explored here. Coverage of sports players and athletes will then be discussed.

Research has examined coverage around the prolific abuse committed by Jimmy Savile, a British presenter, TV personality and charity fundraiser. Greer and McLaughlin (2013), Furedi (2013) and Cree et al. (2014) have focused on the case as an example of an institutional child sexual abuse scandal, moral crusade and moral panic, respectively, focusing more on the creation of the story itself in the press, whilst Boyle (2018) offers an examination of how Savile's abuse was reported. Boyle (2018) has criticised previous work examining Savile. She suggests that Furedi's analysis ignores that early reporting of allegations against Savile did not recognise these as abuse, and that Furedi and Cree et al. focus on the 'disproportionality' of reporting on Savile (Boyle, 2018). Boyle questions this, instead asking 'given the neglect of this story for decades, the scale of the allegations of abuse...what would have been a *proportionate* media response to this story?' (Boyle, 2018: 1563, original emphasis). Similarly, 'moral panic' has been criticised in relation to child sexual abuse, as it is dismissive of the very real fears and scale of child sexual abuse (Boyle, 2018). Of the literature mentioned here, then, Boyle (2018) is the only one who takes a gendered understanding and feminist approach to analysing coverage of Savile, rather than examining the construction of a scandal or panic, so her analysis will be the focus of the discussion on Savile.

Boyle (2018: 1563) argues that the allegations against Savile were not widely believed after his death, and that, when they first came to light, they were not reported as abuse, putting this down to a 'wider cultural acceptance...of men's sexual entitlement to, and abuse of, women'. After his death and funeral, before the abuse was recognised, Savile was often constructed around women (a finding echoed by Soothill and Walby in 1991, in coverage of serial rapist Malcom Fairley), including a lack of significant romantic relationships and closeness with his mother (Boyle, 2018). His comments around seeing relationships as a 'headache' and preferring causal sex were presented as rendering him requiring sympathy, ignoring 'that he treated women as accessible and disposable' (Boyle, 2018: 1567). Savile's harassment of women was also reported on early after his death, but not presented as a problem (Boyle, 2018). After this, early stories when the abuse allegations broke still did not recognise that the women coming forward were children at the time, nor did the stories use

the term 'abuse', and Boyle (2018: 1569) suggests that 'if the scandal remains latent at this point, then, it is at least in part because it is still a sex scandal, which is perfectly in keeping with Savile's existing...persona'. Savile was also described through his celebrity status at this point (Boyle, 2018).

When the claims of abuse begin to be picked up, it is only when it becomes apparent that Savile abused children that they are described as 'abuse', although this was not immediate, highlighting that the age of the victims was required for the abuse to not be mislabelled as sex (Boyle, 2018). However, it became clear that Savile was a serial and prolific abuser, although this required many women who were victims (both as adults and children) to come forward (Boyle, 2018). Boyle also points to a lack of feminist experts in the media coverage of Savile and the enquiries which followed (2018: 1573). Boyle's (2018) analysis highlights that Savile was presented in black and white – either as a 'national treasure' or a 'monster' – but that it took time for the allegations of abuse to be believed, partly because of Savile's status.

Harrington (2016: 7) examined articles published in the *Guardian* and *New York Times* that discussed the rape allegations against Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, finding that most articles assumed the allegations 'stemmed from some combination of political motivations and women scorned'. Many articles therefore treated the allegations as false or 'not really rape' (Harrington, 2016). However, once Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy, this shifted, and articles no longer dismissed the allegations as not amounting to rape (Harrington, 2016). Assange was often referred to through his status as WikiLeaks founder or chief, making WikiLeaks, and not Assange, the grammatical object (Harrington, 2016). When he was the focus of the headlines, his point of view was privileged, for example through quoting Assange or his legal team (Harrington, 2016).

This coverage of high-profile perpetrators is also racialized (Pepin, 2016; Enck-Wanzer, 2009; Waterhouse-Watson, 2018). Examining coverage of male celebrities who perpetrated domestic violence, (Pepin, 2016: 129) found that black men 'were more often presented as

criminals', whilst white perpetrators 'were more likely to contain excuses and justifications for their violence'. Articles used frames around excuses and justifications for the abuse two and half times more for white celebrity perpetrators than black celebrity perpetrators. Similarly, Kitzinger (2009: 89) suggests that 'the history of media coverage of sexual violence is also a history of racism', with stories of 'black beasts' attacking white women as the main presentation of sexual violence in newspapers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Lloyd and Ramon (2017) also found that victims in high-profile cases are likely to be sexualised, evident in the *Sun's* sexualised images and headlines around the abuse of singer Rihanna by her then-boyfriend, singer Chris Brown. Sexualised images were positioned next to photos of Rihanna's injuries (Lloyd and Ramon, 2017). Rihanna was sexualised in relation to the abuse committed by Brown and romanticised more broadly (Rothman et al., 2012). Looking at coverage of this case in 20 US magazines, they found that 36% of articles blamed Rihanna for the abuse (Rothman et al., 2012). As well as this, they found abuse was normalised in 30% of articles, although, positively, the dominant frame in 40% of articles was that abuse is wrong (Rothman et al., 2012).

### 3.3.6 - Resistance to Rape Myths

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, there is evidence pointing to the 'resistance' (Westmarland and Graham, 2010) of rape myths, and this was also found in some of the studies of media coverage of violence against women.

O'Hara (2012) found some articles that did attempt to resist rape myths. For example, in a case where the victim was an 11-year-old girl, one article stated 'An 11-year-old child bears no responsibility for being assaulted, regardless of how she conducts herself. She is a child' (O'Hara, 2012: 253). Similarly, in the case of abuse committed by Chris Brown against Rihanna, 40% of articles framed the abuse as being wrong, (Rothman et al., 2012), with articles challenging ideas that the abuse was justified if rumours that Rihanna had cheated on Brown were true. Harrington (2016) found that commenters on news websites supported feminist

writers and dispute those minimising the allegations against Assange. Similarly, Waterhouse-Watson (2013) found some examples of media coverage that subverted popular narratives around blaming the victims of sexual violence committed by Australian footballers but argues this was 'fraught with difficulty' due to the need to provoke attention within the media.

Whilst some resistance was therefore found, this is minimal when compared to the widespread blaming of the victim and excusing of the perpetrator. However, this is worthy of further research, especially given the growth of the internet and use of this as a space of resistance, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 3.3.7 - Sport, Media & Violence Against Women

Sport is key to consider in looking at media coverage of violence against women, especially given there have been a number of high-profile cases (some of which will be explored in following chapters), and the celebrity status of sportspeople, which was emphasised as important in news coverage by Jewkes (2011). Therefore, research which has examined reporting of athletes who have committed violence against women will be explored here.

#### *3.3.7.1 - Sport, Masculinity and Violence Against Women*

Research has explored the link between sport and violence against women, as 'early research suggested that male athletes have a greater propensity for violence against women than other men' (Flood and Dyson, 2007: 37). For example, Benedict (1997: ix) opens his book by saying that, over the decade between 1986 and 1996, 425 professional and college athletes in the United States were publicly reported for violence against women, with few prosecuted. Messner (1990: 203) has suggested that in many popular sports 'the achievement of goals (scoring and winning) is predicated on the successful utilisation of violence...these are activities in which the human body is routinely turned into a weapon to be used against other bodies'. Sport is therefore an arena in which males 'actively construct meaning around their acts of and violence', and given the spectacle of sports, these often take on ideological meanings (Messner, 1990: 206). Sport is also an important 'organising institution' for the

embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, as it suppresses natural sex similarities, constructs differences and then, particularly through the media, makes these seem natural (Messner, 1990: 214). Media framing of sports, especially combat sports, Messner (1990: 215) argues, 'serves both to unite men in the domination of women and to support the ascendance of hegemonic masculinities and the continued marginalisation of other masculinities'.

However, more recent research has recognised the simplicity of arguing that male athletes are inherently more violent, and instead has begun to identify more specific factors that support violent norms and behaviours (Flood and Dyson, 2007). Flood and Dyson (2007) therefore suggest that when professional athletes 'sexually harass women in pubs, pressure women into sex in hotel rooms or make obscene photo calls, in one sense, they are acting just like thousands of other young men around the country', and women are aware this behaviour is not just limited to athletes (Flood and Dyson, 2007: 39). Similarly, Benedict (1997: xiv) argues that sport does not turn men into violent criminals, nor can sports teams be held responsible for violence committed off-the-field, but that 'as long as the perpetrator can contribute to on-field success, the sports industry turns a blind eye to the black eyes and bruised bodies of women'. Flood and Dyson (2007: 40) therefore argue sport sub-cultures may involve sexist and conservative norms, including violence-supportive norms, with sexist norms and cultures amongst peers a key risk factor for men's perpetration of sexual violence. They also identify other risk factors specific to professional sport which are hypothesised to increase athletes' risk of perpetuating sexual assault, including aggressive sports, sexualised roles for women (such as cheerleaders), and entitlement and celebrity status (Flood and Dyson, 2007: 40-41). The sense of entitlement and celebrity status contributes to a lack of accountability for athletes (Flood and Dyson, 2007; Benedict, 1994). This extends to the legal ramifications, with Flood and Dyson (2007) pointing at the low conviction rates for athletes (see also Benedict, 1994) and suggesting that influential factors on this may be pressure on the victim (for example, not to 'ruin' the perpetrators' career), jurors' sympathy to athletes, and their wealth enabling them to hire more experienced defence. Benedict (1994: 123) also suggests that the status afforded to athletes contributes to the 'exceptional scrutiny' that victims face if they report the act.

The above has highlighted particular concerns around athletes and violence against women as a context for the media reporting of the proceedings against athletes when women report the abuse they have been subjected to. Following on from this, research which has looked at the media reporting of such cases will be explored.

### *3.3.7.2 - Media Coverage of Sport and Violence Against Women*

Benedict (1994) argues that despite increasing number of cases of violence against women reported to the police every year, mainstream media pays little attention to such cases. The exception to this, he suggests, is when a prominent role model, particularly an athlete (who is 'a unique blend of role model and celebrity'), is linked to the case (Benedict, 1994: 25). This clearly echoes the news value of celebrity or high-status person outlined by Jewkes (2011). It is perhaps no surprise, then, that research on media reporting of violence against women has included a focus on athletes as perpetrators. Looking at coverage of O.J. Simpson's, a former NFL player, murder trial, Maxwell et al. (2000) found that few articles both before and during Simpson's trial used a social frame, instead looking at the individual incident and people involved, meaning it was not framed within violence against women more widely. They found that, whilst coverage of domestic violence increased during Simpson's trial, the nature of this coverage did not change (Maxwell et al., 2002). This suggests that coverage is not necessarily different, but that there is more of it. Franiuk et al. (2008a; 2008b) have explored the coverage of allegations of sexual assault against Kobe Bryant, an American basketball player, and found that over 65% of articles included at least one statement that supported rape myths.

Waterhouse-Watson has researched the coverage of Australian footballers who have been accused of sexual violence (2012; 2013; 2016a; 2016b; 2018). She argues (2013: 35) that 'the mere fact that the alleged rapists are well-known footballers, and the alleged victims anonymous women, puts the complainants at an immediate disadvantage in terms of being believed', as many of those consuming news coverage of the cases already hold opinions about the footballers, or feel that they 'know' them. This means that they generally respond

to news about them as they would for someone that they know personally (Waterhouse-Watson, 2013: 35). Franiuk et al. (2008a) found similar in the coverage of Kobe Bryant's trial for rape, with a significant difference in the amount and type of coverage afforded to Bryant and his victim, with more positive coverage assigned to Bryant. Through the use of the five 'characters' of victims discussed above (woman scorned, gold digger, party girl, predatory woman, and groupie), but particularly woman scorned and gold digger, Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 33) argues that footballers are provided with a 'narrative immunity against being held accountable for sexual assault', as these narratives undermine victims. As well as this, footballers become represented as victims themselves (Waterhouse-Watson, 2012; 2018). Similarly, elsewhere she argues (2016a: 70) that footballers have been granted 'a higher status than mere mortals' – [they are] object of worship, whose failings can be excused'. As well as this, they are also infantilised, again marking them as not responsible for their actions (Waterhouse-Watson, 2016a). In her 2016 work, Waterhouse-Watson does not find the victim to be blamed in the same way as her 2013 research (through the use of stereotypes), but instead articles were 'reifying playing football in such a way that it supersedes the interests of women allegedly harmed' (2016a: 75).

Referring to the perpetrator through their career has also been found (Franiuk et al., 2008a; Waterhouse-Watson, 2016b; Pepin, 2016). For example, articles discussed whether a footballer on trial for sexual assault would be available to play football (Waterhouse-Watson, 2016b). As well as this, Waterhouse-Watson (2018: 446) found that the sport of football itself was also 'frequently portrayed as victim', including hurting a club's chances of winning a game. This was sometimes referred to in terms of physical assault – for example, 'NSW Fans Reeling' – and the case being a 'distraction' for players (Waterhouse-Watson, 2018: 446).

There are a number of issues more specific to the coverage of athletes accused of committing violence against women, such as increased coverage, and a ready built support system in the media in the form of fans of the sport.

### 3.4 - Abuse in Online Spaces

The abuse of women online is an area receiving growing attention from the media, researchers and the public (Megarry, 2014). Lumsden and Morgan (2012) have argued that previous academic discussion of 'trolling' (which they liken to a form of cyber-bullying) has lacked a gendered analysis of the practice and its repercussions, particularly around the genders of who is doing the abuse, and who is receiving it. They argue that 'trolling' highlights 'the (sexual) abuse and harassment experienced by women who dare to step or trespass into (cyber) spaces deemed to be 'men's domain'' (Lumsden and Morgan, 2012: 10). Mantilla (2013: 564) distinguishes between 'trolling' and 'gendertrolling', saying that the latter is 'a relatively new kind of virulent, more threatening online phenomenon than the generic trolling'. This gendertrolling is made distinct by the participation of (often coordinated) numerous groups of people, the use of gender-based insults, vicious language, credible threats (such as rape and death threats), the intensity, scope and longevity of attacks, and as being a reaction to women speaking out about a form of sexism (Mantilla, 2013: 564-565). Mantilla (2013: 569) draws similarities between gendertrolling and sexual harassment, pointing out that it 'systematically targets women to prevent them from fully occupying public spaces'. This is echoed by Cole (2015: 356) who suggests that anti-feminist engagement in social media 'functions as a disciplinary rhetoric', aiming to silence women who are feminist from participating in public spaces. This includes the use of rape threats (as suggested by Mantilla, 2013; see also Vera-Gray, 2017), with Cole exploring the accounts of female bloggers who have experienced such threats (2015). These threats 'impede [women's] freedom of expression and often causes them to modify their own behaviours in response', with women being silenced and depoliticised when challenging sexism online (Megarry, 2014: 53). Keller et al. (2018: 2) argue that we must recognise that 'anyone who challenges popular misogyny puts themselves at risk of becoming the subject of sexist attacks and abuse'. These threats and abuse are also experienced by feminist researchers online, with Vera-Gray (2017) sharing the abuse she received after recruiting online for her research into street harassment, despite not identifying the work as feminist in her recruitment information. Vera-Gray (2017: 75) argues that, given growing awareness of online abuse of women, there is a 'strong case for seeing the violence, abuse, intrusion and intimidation' that women experience online as an extension of, rather than distinct from, forms experienced in offline public spaces.

However, despite the abuse women face, particularly when engaging with feminist activism or research, online spaces also offer ‘unparalleled opportunities’ for women and girls to form and participate in spaces which receive, discuss and act on disclosures of sexual violence differently to offline spaces (Salter, 2013). Powell (2015: 573) suggests that new media and communications technologies are ‘mediating new social practices of informal justice’ for victim-survivors of sexual violence, which, in turn, can challenge meanings of justice more broadly. This may be through disclosing online (Powell, 2015). Moors and Webber (2012: 800) found a ‘small but significant amount of help-seeking behaviour’ on Yahoo Answers, a community-driven online question and answer service, with anonymity being a potential motivation for disclosing online. Posts were often made with the hope of clarifying their experiences (for example, in labelling or defining the abuse) and gaining helpful feedback (Moors and Webber, 2012: 803). Some posters shared how previous disclosures offline had been unsupportive, or how they had not disclosed previously due to fears of being stigmatised (Moors and Webber, 2012: 806). Moors and Webber (2012: 811) therefore suggest that many of those using Yahoo Answers felt that they ‘had ‘nowhere else to turn’’. Responses to the posts were mostly positive and supportive, although a minority were negative, admonishing or questioning the legitimacy of the poster (Moors and Webber, 2012). These findings echo those of O’Neill (2018), who found those posting on a specific rape counselling space on Reddit were seeking emotional support and validation, with the anonymity of Reddit offering a safety net for victim-survivors. Like those in Moors and Webber’s sample, those posting on Reddit feared being blamed, and some shared the difficult experiences they had had in disclosing to their real-life support networks (O’Neill, 2018: 50). Some asked for advice, whilst others used the space to share their stories (O’Neill, 2018). Like Powell, O’Neill suggests that disclosing in these spaces may be fulfilling a broader need for justice for victim-survivors, and Salter (2013: 229) has suggested that the willingness of some victim-survivors to use alternative modes of discourse and redress as highlighting a ‘perceived shortfall in the adequacy of institutional responses’. Whilst analysis of the comments was beyond the scope of O’Neill’s article, they note that solidarity was often expressed by other users through the comments (O’Neill, 2018: 51), although the space being analysed differs from Moors and Webber’s in that the forum is focused on rape. Westmarland and Graham (2010) also found

victim-survivors disclosing in an online forum discussing a TV show which operated as a fictional rape trial, where celebrities took the place of the jury. Disclosures were often made to challenge the rape myths posted by other users of the forum, such as around why a woman may not react to a rape the way one might expect (Westmarland and Graham, 2010: 89).

Victim-survivors are also using online technologies for activism, such as through hashtags on social media (Williams, 2015; Keller et al., 2018; Megarry, 2014). Megarry (2014) explored women's use of the hashtag #mencallmethings on Twitter to reproduce and discuss their experiences of online harassment from men, and this is conceptualised as consciousness raising and a political challenge to male dominance. Keller et al. (2018) explored the use of #BeenRapedNeverReported as a space to disclose their experiences, and why they did not report the sexual violence that happened to them. Interviewing seven women who used the hashtag, they found that participants spoke about the sense of 'community, solidarity and support' in the space the hashtag provided (Keller et al., 2018: 7). They also suggest that the solidarity produced through the hashtag is '*doing something politically*', and potentially generates wider feminist consciousness (Keller et al., 2018: 8, original emphasis). Keller et al. (2018) note that, in conducting the research, they were struck by the high number of teenage feminists using social media to challenge rape culture, and how social media was acknowledged as a 'gateway' to feminism. Williams (2015: 342) has also pointed to the importance of online spaces as a tool to draw attention to violence against black women, particularly as it does not rely on forms of traditional media which ignore the abuse of black women, which is rendered as 'not newsworthy'. Rentschler (2014) has also explored feminist bloggers using social media to challenge rape culture, including on Tumblr and Hollaback!, an international anti-street harassment group which produced a mobile application for documenting and mapping experiences. Like Moors and Webber and O'Neill, Rentschler (2014: 78) also found supporting victim-survivors in these spaces, and, like Keller et al., noted that this is of 'political importance'. Through social media, feminists online 'not only expose rape culture, its supporters and perpetrators', but also represent their experiences in online spaces which enable distribution and collective response (Rentschler, 2014: 79), offering spaces for women and girls to connect and find solidarity (Keller et al., 2018).

From the above, it is clear online spaces can be both positive and negative for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Whilst the internet can be a source of abuse, including rape threats, for women (particularly feminists) online, it also offers a space for solidarity, activism and support.

### **3.5 - Consequences of Media**

Despite evidence around the presentation of sexual violence in the media, there has been less attention paid to how the news and media coverage of rape might impact upon victim-survivors, and this is the main contribution to knowledge of this thesis. For example, Kelly (1988: 200) mentions that, for her participants, having more awareness of the reality of sexual violence had affected their enjoyment of entertainment such as films, television and books, and that these portrayals for some women had led to flashbacks and feeling physically sick, and, on the American version of the film *The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo*, Phillips (2017: 88) quotes a victim-survivor who described feeling tense, panicky, struggling to breathe, disassociating and being overwhelmed with nausea in response to the rape of the main character Lisbeth Salander.

The most significant work in this area is that by Schlesinger et al. (1992), who conducted a study of women's viewing of violence. Women who had experienced men's violence and those who had not were separated into fourteen viewing groups, and participants filled in a quantitative survey prior to the viewings. Four forms of media were included in the viewings: *Crimewatch* (a factual TV show rooted in crime reporting); *Eastenders* (a fictional soap opera); *Closing Ranks* (a fictional TV drama considered to be a realistic portrayal of domestic violence); and *The Accused* (a fictional feature film which included a rape scene lasting over five minutes) (Schlesinger et al., 1992). Group discussions of the programmes were also held afterwards. Schlesinger et al. (1992: 9) note that the consequences of the coverage impacted both women who had experienced men's violence and those who had not:

For some members of the audience, reactions to televised violence involve an interaction with their experience of violence. For others, there is an awareness that they too could become the victims of violence, particularly rape.

This fear of men's violence, particularly rape, was the 'most striking example of similarity' between the groups of women (Schlesinger et al., 1992: 166). They further write that, within their participants, 'every woman could identify with the fear of rape: it would seem to be more universal' (Schlesinger et al., 1992: 166), and that the group discussions following *Crimewatch* and *The Accused* revealed high levels of anxiety around personal safety.

The programmes resulted in a range of responses for the participants. For example, around 70% of the women with experiences of male violence indicated that they could identify with the characters in *Closing Ranks*, the fictional drama showing domestic violence, and 36% of the women without experiences of violence also indicated this (Schlesinger et al., 1992: 123). Similarly, the selected episode of *Crimewatch* included a case where a young woman was raped and murdered, and 50% of the women with experience of violence, and 30% of those without experience of male violence, reported that they could identify with the young woman. The women also referred to how they felt when watching the programmes:

Obviously she [another woman in the group] was upset because she related that to herself. I can understand her being upset because I went through that at first. See, you do, you just watch the very slightest thing and you become very, very upset. (Participant with experience of violence in Schlesinger et al., 1992: 91)

and:

The violent bit made me feel quite sick...Because I knew exactly how the woman was feeling. (Participant with experience of violence in Schlesinger et al., 1992: 92)

Women without experiences of violence were also impacted:

My heart sunk like lead over it. I could feel myself moving about in my chair. It really quite disturbed me. (Participant without experience of violence, in Schlesinger et al., 1992: 151)

Schlesinger et al.'s work highlights that it is not just necessarily women with experiences of male violence who are impacted by men's violence in the media, but potentially *all* women, especially with regards to fears of violence.

Kitzinger (2004) found when conducting focus groups with victim-survivors in the mid-1990s that the portrayal of victim-survivors was important, particularly that of incest survivor Beth Jordache in the British Channel 4 soap *Brookside*, with participants in one group saying:

You can watch it and say – I had those feelings like Beth. That happened to me. [...] We've got some kind of communication with the telly and can talk to each other about the way Beth is (in Kitzinger, 2004: 43)

The women liked Beth as she was a 'realistic' portrayal of a victim-survivor, as well as being strong and confident (Kitzinger, 2004: 43), not 'a big shadow, all blacked out. That makes me feel terrible, they're hiding' (in Kitzinger, 2004: 43). Kitzinger (2004) notes that the women in the groups were not alone in appreciating the portrayal of Beth, as when news that she would die by suicide leaked, victim-survivor groups demonstrated outside the TV studios with banners reading 'Save Our Survivor', and the story was rewritten so that Beth died of natural causes. Some of the women described the portrayal of Beth as having been helpful to them, and negative representations of victim-survivors impacting their self-image (Kitzinger, 2004). Beth is also discussed by Boyle (2005: 165), who argues that the introduction of the Jordache family 'provided a long-running sensationalist story to boost flagging ratings', a strategy also adopted by *Emmerdale* in a storyline featuring the soap's first child sexual abuse storyline, and by *Coronation Street*, which featured a husband abusing his wife. Whilst Boyle suggests that the use of violence against women storylines to boost ratings is concerning (a concern also raised by Schlesinger et al.'s participants when discussing an episode of *Eastenders*), she highlights that soaps 'can help to end abused women's sense of isolation, provide a language with which they can name their experiences (sometimes for the first time) and provide an impetus to begin the support-seeking process' (2005: 165). As well as this, British soaps have been praised for their 'sensitive, critical and pro-feminist treatment of violence against women' (Boyle, 2005: 165). Discussing the experiences of violence against the women in the Slater family in BBC soap *Eastenders*, Boyle (2005: 171) highlights that such shows can 'work

to create a collective, potentially feminist, identity for abused women', with calls to specialist services rising after such portrayals. However, Boyle notes that such specialist helplines are no longer directly advertised, but referral services (such as the BBC Action Line) are advertised instead, writing 'there is justified concern that soaps may thus increase victim/survivors' isolation by raising the issue without providing appropriate follow-up' (2005: 171).

Violence against women continues to be portrayed in soaps, with *Coronation Street* featuring the grooming of a sixteen-year-old female character, Bethany Platt, throughout 2017, and working with the NSPCC on the storyline. The story received complaints to Ofcom in June 2017, when the soap showed three older men entering a room that Bethany was locked in, implying (but not showing) she was about to be raped (Roberts, 2017). The NSPCC told *Digital Spy* earlier that year that 'soaps play an important part in highlighting abuse, in giving victims the courage to speak out and in signposting them to help and support' (Kilkelly, 2017). It is interesting to note that the NSPCC is not a women's specialist sexual violence service.

Kitzinger (2010: 94) found that the victim-survivors of childhood sexual abuse she interviewed felt there was a 'cultural vacuum' around presentations of sexual abuse committed by a family member, which contributed to them struggling to name their abuser, and having no reference points to define the abuse. The character of Beth Jordache was therefore important for the victim-survivors she spoke to. Kitzinger (2010: 94) describes this 'lack of cultural and social recognition' as being identified as 'one of the most frightening and disorientating aspects'. As well as this, the lack of media coverage of sexual abuse committed by family members 'made it hard for children to resist abuse being dismissed as consensual' and struggle to identify the abuse as sexual violence (Kitzinger, 2010: 95). The media was also a trigger for victim-survivors, as coverage 'forced them to confront memories they had been trying to ignore' (Kitzinger, 2010: 96), but also facilitated women making sense of and even disclosing what had happened (Kitzinger, 2010: 97).

Exploring prime time TV shows in the US between 1976 and 1990, Cuklanz (2000) found that masculinity remained the focus of narratives on rape on such shows, with male detectives and other male professionals being the main characters. In the earlier period of the sample, victims remained silent, and were granted more of a voice, becoming more prominent as time progressed, but male characters were still often the focus of episodes (Cuklanz, 2000). For example, when a victim has been subject to brutality, the primary function of this is 'not to allow her to speak and tell the story of her attack, but to provide the protagonist detective with an opportunity to vent his rage' (Cuklanz, 2000: 35). Meanwhile, rapists 'shifted from being characterised as demented and abominable criminals to seeming more normal but still harbouring unhealthy, sexist, racist and dangerous ideas that led to violence against women' (Cuklanz, 2000: 155). Rape is not presented as connected to structural problems, but, in episodes in the early-1980s, as 'the result of sick, perverted, and even psychotic individuals', with rapists rarely being 'normal' men or regular characters on the shows (Cuklanz, 2000: 69). In the late-1980s, rapists were more likely to be acquaintances of their victims, but episodes in this period also featured the 'most brutal stranger rapes' of the time period Cuklanz examined (2000: 73). Building upon this work and exploring the presentation of US show *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (SVU)*, Cuklanz and Moorti (2006: 303) suggest that the show 'thematise and elaborate key elements of feminist understandings of sexual violence'. *SVU* does not objectify the victims it shows, and rarely shows the assault itself, 'thus omitting titillating and objectifying details common in previous media representations' as well as highlighting the failings of the criminal justice system (Cuklanz and Moorti, 2006: 307-308). Cuklanz and Moorti (2006: 317) conclude that *SVU* departs from most other prime-time depictions of sexual violence.

Work has also considered men's experiences of viewing violence (Schlesinger et al., 1998). A total of 88 men viewed depictions of violence, including *Eastenders*, as with the work with women, as well as another TV drama depicting domestic violence, *TripTrap*. A clear difference between this and the work with women was that, for the male participants, 'none of the material they saw engendered any fear of violence in society, whether the depictions were based in reality or fiction' (Schlesinger et al., 1998: iv). When viewing depictions of men's violence against their female partners, the participants 'displayed little or no interest in the

effect on [the victim] of her husband's...abusive nature', and questioned the character of the women who stayed with abusive partners, whereas the women in the 1992 study expressed concern (Schlesinger et al., 1998: vi). Similarly, whilst women unequivocally condemned rape regardless of the circumstances, the men in the follow up study showed were less clear, with some feeling one woman 'deserved it', and showing ambivalence towards another rape scene (Schlesinger et al., 1998: vi). This therefore has potential consequences for men who commit violence against women.

Whilst the literature discussed above is significant, particularly the contribution of Schlesinger et al. (1992), it highlights how a lack of research dedicated to exploring how news media coverage of sexual violence affects victim-survivors, particularly in the current context, a gap which this thesis hopes to fill.

### **3.6 - Summary**

Research has shown that media coverage of crime and men's violence against women is not always an accurate representation of the reality of these incidents. As well as this, fictional coverage of sexual violence has also been suggested to be important for victim-survivors of rape and sexual abuse. This chapter brings the literature review to a close, and the next chapter will offer an overview of the methods used in this research.

## Chapter 4 – Research Methods and Methodology

### 4.1 - Introduction

The research utilised mixed qualitative methods, including an analysis of 204 news articles, and a total of 23 semi-structured interviews. The chapter will begin with a discussion around feminist research, before moving on to explore the issues related to conducting the media analysis. The interview phase of the research will then be discussed, before considering ethical implications around the work and then reflecting on my experiences conducting the research, before drawing to a close.

As a reminder, the questions this research aimed to answer were:

1. What forms of victim-blaming are present in the media in high profile sexual violence cases, and how are they resisted?
2. What are the consequences of victim-blaming for women victim-survivors?
3. How do sexual violence support organisations resist these themes or mitigate their impact in their work with women victim-survivors?

### 4.2 - Feminist Approaches to Research

This study adopted a feminist understanding of sexual violence, as was discussed in the literature review chapter, and this approach was also used when considering the research methods. Here, an overview of what it means to do feminist research will be offered, before moving on to explore feminist approaches to conducting semi-structured interviews.

#### 4.2.1 - Feminist Methodology

Skinner, Hester and Malos (2005: 10) suggest that, as with feminist theory more broadly, there is not a 'single feminist methodology', but instead suggest that there are seven common

characteristics or principles amongst research adopting a feminist framework. These include a focus on gender and gender inequality, which Skinner et al. (2005: 10) state are 'at the heart of most feminist research on gender violence'. Similarly, Kennedy Bergen (1993: 200) states that 'feminist research is, above all else, woman centred'. The second principle is 'a rejection of the standard academic distinction between the researcher and the 'researched'' (Skinner et al., 2005: 11), with many adopting this principle to minimise power imbalance between the researcher and the participant. However, Skinner et al. (2005) also suggest that this approach can lead to participants being actively involved in developing and analysing the research, although this can raise its own difficulties.

The third characteristic is 'enabling the voices of women and other marginalised groups to be heard and their experiences valued' (Skinner et al., 2005: 12). Within this, Skinner et al. (2005: 12) state that this involves 'democratisation of the research process', which could include providing child-care and ensuring that research does not re-traumatise women. The fourth principle is stating the importance of research being politically active or emancipatory, and this can be achieved in practice by enabling women's voices to be heard by practitioners, or providing 'robust data in the form that a particular audience may be more able to digest' (Skinner et al., 2005). This also involves 'bridging the gap' between practice and research, sometimes involving a dual role on behalf of the researcher (Skinner et al., 2005).

The fifth characteristic is that of reflexivity, which is the consideration and discussion of the effects of power relations within the research process, the ethical judgements made and accountability for the knowledge produced (Skinner et al., 2005: 15). Reflexivity is also discussed by Hesse-Biber (2014: 215) who suggests it is an important tool that allows researchers to be aware of their status differences when conducting research. I shared commonalities with many of the women I interviewed, such as through our shared gender identity, and I believe that my status as a Rape Crisis volunteer ensured I was an insider when conducting the supporter interviews, and offered me a level of insider status when conducting the victim-survivor interviews. However, there were still likely to be power imbalances between myself and my participants, based on my status as researcher, and their status as

researched. However, Campbell et al. (2010) outline six principles for interviewing victim-survivors of rape in order to minimise risk of retraumatisation, and to also minimise power imbalances between the interviewer and interviewee. These principles, and how I adopted them, will be discussed later in the chapter.

The sixth characteristic is that of the well-being, both emotional and physical, of the researcher and the researched, with the researcher needing to be aware of the effects the research may be having on participants (Skinner et al., 2005). Within this is accepting that researching violence against women is emotionally difficult work, but that we, as feminists and researchers, do it because of 'hope that we can help survivors be heard, hope that we can change institutional responses, hope that we can change society' (Skinner et al., 2005: 17). Certainly, this hope was key in my own decision to conduct this research. This role of emotion is also discussed by Dickson-Swift et al. (2009: 63), who suggest that we must 'challenge the dominance of the Western philosophical tradition that judges emotions to be the anathema to academic research'. Similarly, Blakely (2007: 60) argues that feminist researchers are 'confounded with emotion-laden material', and that it would be difficult not to be affected by some of the experiences we encounter. She suggests that the 'ethic of care' we apply to our participants must also be applied to ourselves (2007: 65).

The seventh and final characteristic of feminist research identified by Skinner et al. is the selection of research methods. Feminist research has its roots in qualitative research, and Griffiths and Hanmer (2005: 23) describe research on violence against women as beginning with 'talking to women about their experiences', with quantitative research as 'undervalued'. They describe the move towards quantitative feminist research as being linked to a government and policy focus on 'what works' (Griffiths and Hanmer, 2005). Similarly, Skinner et al. (2005) write that a focus on the appropriate method for the research at hand had led to more use of mixed-methods rather than a purely qualitative approach in conducting feminist research:

What is particularly important in feminist research is that the approaches adopted come at the topic under investigation in a way that is more likely to reflect the

experiences of women and children, rather than distorting them (Skinner et al., 2005: 17)

Consequently, it is important to consider which methods are best for the study at hand, and which methods are likely to accurately represent the voices of participants. Within this research, which was seeking to explore and understand the experiences of victim-survivors of rape, it was felt that qualitative, semi-structured interviews was the more appropriate method. Feminist views on interviewing will therefore be discussed next.

#### 4.2.2 - Semi-Structured Interviews

There are several possible reasons that feminist researchers, particularly those researching violence against women, may use qualitative interviews. For example, Westmarland (2001: 10) suggests that interviews 'are needed to fully understand women's experiences and theorise these experiences with a view to social change' and that interviews can be used to find out how women's lives are affected. Westmarland (2001: 8) has also noted that for feminist researchers, interviews are a way of involving participants. Whilst this is used partly to increase the validity of the research, the primary reason is that feminist researchers are working towards the end of women's oppression, and it would therefore be unacceptable for research to further oppress women (Westmarland, 2001: 8).

Interviews allow for researchers to explore a topic more deeply than other methods could allow and, as feminism is concerned with social change, Westmarland (2001: 9) argues that it is 'only by delving deeper can we find out not only what needs to be changed, but also how it can be changed'. Interviews are therefore uniquely positioned for women to use their voices to share what is important to them, and use these voices to create change. Similarly, Reinharz (1992: 19) states that interviewing 'offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of a researcher'. When interviewing women, this is particularly important as 'in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women' (Reinharz, 1992: 19).

The use of semi-structured interviews allows for guiding by the researcher in order to guarantee certain topics can be discussed, whilst also remaining flexible and allowing the participant to speak in their own language (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Reinharz (1992: 18) also suggests that semi-structured interviews also allow for 'free interaction' between the interviewer and the interviewee. This flexibility and freedom was utilised in the interviews conducted within this research, with different questions asked, or the order of questions changing, depending on what and when participants raised in their discussion. As Hesse-Biber (2014: 187) writes, with semi-structured interviewing, the researcher would 'try not to disrupt the flow of the interview but would do [their] best to inject these questions at a time' that felt appropriate in the interview. Flexibility in questions in this research will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Oakley has been influential regarding feminist ways of conducting interviews with women. Oakley's method argues there is a contradiction between the 'objective' and 'scientific' interviewing expected in the social sciences and feminist research requiring 'openness, engagement and the development of a potentially long-lasting relationship' (Reinharz, 1992: 27). When interviewing pregnant women, Oakley (1981: 48) suggests that she 'did not regard it as reasonable to adopt a purely exploitative attitude to interviewees as sources of data'. Oakley (1981: 48) also argues that sociological research is a way of documenting women's own accounts, and giving them greater visibility not only in sociology, but in society, than has traditionally been allowed. Another concept proposed by Oakley is that of 'believing the interviewee', which has been noted as significant by Reinharz (1992: 28) as 'social interaction typically involves a certain amount of deception and because science relies on scepticism'. Reinharz (1992: 28) suggests that some researchers have declared believing the interviewee as being 'a decidedly feminist approach'. As with Oakley's other concepts around interviewing women, this is significant, especially when interviewing women who have experienced sexual violence, who may have had their experiences discounted or not believed. Therefore, I consider it to be a feminist act to believe women's accounts of sexual violence and came from a place of genuine belief when conducting the interviews in this research. The three notions

outlined above are important to me, especially coming from a background of supporting and working with women who have experienced sexual violence.

### **4.3 - Media Analysis**

The media analysis in this research uses the retrial of Ched Evans, a Welsh footballer. Key information and overview of the case will be discussed in Chapter 5. Here, the decision surrounding including this case in the research will be discussed.

Initially, the news analysis portion of this research was planned to be conducted over a set time period, and to follow a set number of pre-determined publications for a month-long period, with articles being collected through LexisNexis, an online database which allows users to access UK news publications, both at a local and national level, and to filter results using specific search terms, types of publications and dates. This method would therefore aim to collect articles focused more on 'smaller' cases. This method had been used in the pilot study of the research (my Masters dissertation), and was used to examine a month worth's of domestic violence stories in the UK. Whilst there were benefits to the use of LexisNexis in this way, such as accessibility, there were also major constrictions. For example, in the pilot study, there were significant issues with search results not being relevant to the research, despite refinement of the search terms. This, alongside the publication of duplicate articles across different local publications, resulted in a time-consuming process of sifting through results. For example, one search within the pilot project initially returned 783 results which, after sorting through the results, resulted in only 41 relevant articles.

As well as this, the focus of this research was more on the 'everyday' lives of victim-survivors and, as suggested by Soothill and Walby (1991), a high-profile case would enter mainstream discussion more than less high-profile cases, which may only be covered in local and regional publications. It was therefore theorised that high-profile cases would be more invasive and therefore impact more on the 'everyday' lives of victim-survivors. Based on this, it was therefore decided to move away from the set time-period and LexisNexis model, as this would

instead capture the 'smaller' cases of sexual violence in the media, rather than those which may have more of an impact on the lives of victim-survivors.

It was also felt that more online sources should be included in the media sample (which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter), and which LexisNexis is unable to include in its search results. This online source was felt to be significant due to the nature of 'sharing' news articles online, such as through social media, and the potential interactions victim-survivors would have with articles in this way. However, examining this was deemed to be beyond the scope and possibilities of this doctoral research, and it is therefore suggested that examining interactions with news articles (such as sharing and commenting on publications' websites or social media) is an area of future research, particularly given that other people's interactions with the media (both online and offline) was identified as an issue by both the supporters and the victim-survivors interviewed in this project.

After the decision was made to move away from LexisNexis and to focus on specific high-profile cases of sexual violence in the media, it was decided to examine two to three of these high-profile cases in the media as they occurred over the period of data collection and the second year of the PhD. Due to the limited time involved in completing the doctoral project, coverage would be limited to a month around each of the cases. A list of previous cases was drawn up to highlight that sexual violence is a regular occurrence in news media, and that it was not anticipated selecting cases would be an issue. This list can be found in **Appendix 1**. Towards the end of the first year of the project, one of these cases was identified: Ched Evans' retrial, which was announced to be taking place in October 2016. Whilst the sample for this case was being collected, a second case emerged – child sexual abuse committed against young boys playing in football teams by coaches, including Barry Bennell (who has since been found guilty and jailed). The inclusion of this case would have marked a departure from previously set criteria decided upon for the media cases, which included the victim in the case being female and over the age of thirteen, but the case was felt to be too significant to ignore, especially given evidence that male abusers target male and female children, and how this fits within a feminist understanding of sexual violence. Similarly, we know that abusers target

both children and adult women (such as Jimmy Savile). Therefore, it was felt that the case fit within the broader aims of the research, and would contribute to knowledge in the area. A total of 564 articles were collected relating to the childhood sexual abuse in football case. It is worth noting that the number of articles published within the same period for this case was significantly higher than the number of articles published regarding Evans' retrial for rape.

However, the analysis on these articles was never conducted. After the sample for this and the Evans case was collected, the analysis of the 204 articles which formed the sample for the Evans retrial was conducted, and a findings chapter was drafted. Following this draft, and after discussion with my supervisors, it was felt that this analysis provided enough data for the media analysis portion of the research, especially given that the main contribution of the research was the interviews regarding the consequences of media coverage on victim-survivors of sexual violence. It is therefore another suggestion and an intention of my own future research that these articles be analysed, especially in light of the comments made during the supporter interviews regarding what they felt was the gendered nature, and the differences that were apparent, in reporting of this case and the male victims versus initial coverage of the women who reported abuse committed by Jimmy Savile (see also Boyle, 2018).

Ched Evans' retrial therefore became the sole case analysed in the media portion of the research. This was partly due to the timing of the retrial and its alignment with the data collection phase, but also because of the depth of the findings highlighting within the case, which will be discussed later in the thesis. As will be discussed in the interview findings chapters, the case acted as a reference point for many of the participants, partly due to the longevity of the case, and partly due to the details of the case itself, particularly the treatment of the woman involved.

#### 4.3.1 - Sampling and Data Collection

Sampling methods used in other studies examining news coverage of sexual violence are often either outdated or vague, meaning it proved difficult to find a sampling strategy to replicate in this research. For example, Soothill and Walby (1991) focused on print media coverage from the 1950s to the mid-1980s, and included a range of newspapers within their study, which adapted over the span of the sample period, including new publications due to increase in popularity. However, other than this, they do not expand on the selection criteria for the publications included. Similarly, in a study using the same data as their 1991 work, but with a smaller focus, they stated that their use of four newspapers was designed to 'give a range to both 'quality' and 'popular' papers and both dailies and weeklies' (Walby et al., 1983: 86), but this lacks a detailed explanation and rationale. In Harrington's (2016) analysis of coverage of rape allegations against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, she examined only the *New York Times* and *Guardian* over three years, referring to their global audience and close attention to WikiLeaks prior to the allegations. Whilst this is therefore useful for examining coverage of Assange, it is a limited selection. Whilst Waterhouse-Watson (2016b) states she used both local and national newspapers in her analysis of coverage of Australian footballer Brett Stewart, and includes her selection criteria for articles, this is unhelpful for cases outside of Sydney and Australia, and still fails to offer a reliable method of selecting publications when studying news media. Similarly, Franiuk et al. (2008a) describe aiming for a geographically representative sample of the United States, again limiting its usefulness for a case in the UK. Some studies report using LexisNexis (for example, O'Hara, 2012; Boyle, 2018), which, as outlined above, was felt to be unsuitable for this research. Greer has also examined the reporting of the 'full spectrum of sex offences', focusing on print coverage in Northern Ireland (2003: 4). Other than stating that the newspaper items were collected in a library archive (2003: 5), and that three daily Northern Irish newspapers, two Sunday newspapers, and one Dublin-based newspaper formed the sample, Greer does not go into detail about his sampling strategies (2003: 6). Benedict (1992) also does not describe in great detail how she selected publications when she examined four high-profile cases in the United States, beyond stating that she focused on local and national papers and listing those included. In coverage of domestic violence, studies have focused on specific locations and therefore local or regional publications (for example, Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Bullock, 2010; Taylor, 2009; Richards et al., 2011; Gillespie et al., 2013), or on specific publications (Braber, 2012), thereby offering

little support for development of a sampling strategy for research outside of these parameters.

Because of this, significant time was dedicated to developing a sampling strategy for this research that could either be reused or adapted for future research into news media coverage of high-profile cases of sexual violence (for example, future research could use the comment sections on the articles). The process for developing this sample is outlined below.

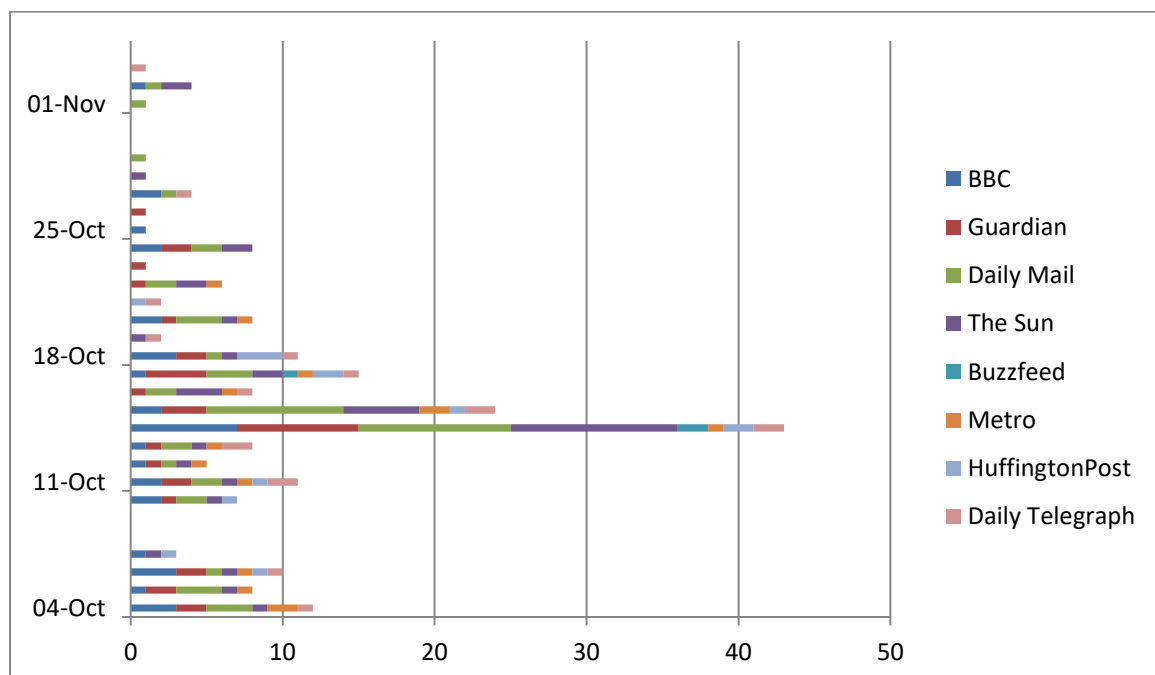
For the coverage of Evans' retrial, the sample consisted of online news articles about Evans or the retrial, beginning from the day the retrial started (no coverage was found in the days preceding), and lasting for a month (from 4<sup>th</sup> October 2016 to 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016). Eight newsbrands were selected to form the sample. This was done using data from the National Readership Survey (NRS), which aims to determine the size and nature of publications' readers. The sample is drawn from the Royal Mail Postcode Address file and is weighted to be representative of the population. Residents of Great Britain over the age of fifteen are invited to take part, and interviews are conducted in participants' home using a double screen computer system. In 2012, NRS PADD was launched in order to gather data about online and digital publications in addition to print. Using NRS data for the period of July 2015 to June 2016, the most recent data available at the time of research, eight newsbrands were carefully selected in order to ensure a representative picture of news coverage in Great Britain, across different types of publications (e.g. online only, broadsheet, middle market and tabloid newspapers), their popularity across different formats, their political leanings and the composition of their readers.

The included publications were *BBC* (online-only), *Buzzfeed* (online-only), *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Huffington Post* (online-only), *Metro* and *Sun*. *BBC* produced 35 articles that were included in the sample and was selected as it is the national broadcaster and had a slightly higher percentage of male readers (55% versus 45% female). *Buzzfeed* had the lowest number of articles included in the sample at three and was included to represent online media

and for its middle-left approach. *Huffington Post* was included for similar reasons, as well as for being more of a broadsheet style than the other online-only publications. *Daily Mail*, a middle-market publication, had the highest number of articles in the sample, with 51, and had the highest percentage of female readers (53%). It was the most read across all platforms and is also well-known for being more right-leaning. *Daily Telegraph* (15 articles) had an equal gender split in its readership, is right leaning, and is a broadsheet style publication. *Guardian* (36 articles in the sample) was included for similar reasons, except for being more left-leaning. *Metro* (13 articles in the sample) had an almost equal gender readership, is middle market, and is also available freely on public transport. Finally, *Sun*, which had 39 articles in the sample, had a higher male percentage of readers (54%), and is a right-leaning tabloid.

A total of 204 articles were included in the sample. Articles were sourced using a Google search of the publication’s website on each day of the sample period, as this could be used for all the sources in the sample. The graph below shows the spread of articles throughout the month sample period (with the peak being the day the verdict was returned), broken down by publication.

FIGURE 1 NUMBER OF ARTICLES PUBLISHED ON CHED EVANS' RETRIAL, 4/10/2016 TO 4/11/2018



### 4.3.2 - Analysis

Analysis of the articles was completed using deductive coding. Originally, this deductive coding was going to use themes derived from literature (such as on rape myths, victim-blaming and news reporting of crime), but after reflection and discussion, it was decided to use guidelines for journalists (discussed in more detail below) instead, as these are resources already available for journalists and offer concrete advice for how journalists could and should be covering sexual violence cases in the media. By doing this, the research could ascertain whether these guidelines were being adopted by journalists, and what gaps in coverage these guidelines may have, as well as examining the nature of the coverage.

#### 4.3.2.1 - National Union of Journalist Guidelines

The guidelines used in the analysis of the news articles were the National Union of Journalist's (NUJ) guidelines for reporting on violence against women, published in 2013. The full document can be found in **Appendix 2**, but, as the guidelines are for reporting on violence against women more broadly, not all were relevant for sexual violence. Therefore, the guidelines used from the NUJ were:

1. Include helpline and support information
2. Do not blame religion or culture
3. Frame as violence against women
4. Avoid negative gender stereotypes
5. Do not sexualise women and girls
6. Take care not to excuse the perpetrator
7. Make the perpetrator visible
8. Do not refer to perpetrator as a monster
9. Name acts accurately
10. Do not blame survivor
11. Include educational materials
12. Include up to date statistics
13. Use appropriate language for survivor
14. Report stranger rapes as rarer

During analysis, an additional code was added that was not part of the NUJ guidance; 'do not distract from the perpetrator'. More information about these guidelines, including quotes from the NUJ document, can be found in Chapter 5.

The guidelines were developed by Davina James-Hanman, who opted to be named in the research, and had been working in the field of violence against women for over 30 years when we spoke. The guidelines came about as James-Hanman was trying to ensure others thought more broadly in terms of prevention work:

[I] was pushing for them to be a little bit more imaginative in how they thought about prevention because it's long been a soap box piece of mine that people talk about 'prevention should be at the heart of violence against women strategies' and you say 'what does that look like?' and they say 'work in schools' and it begins and ends there

James-Hanman identified a number of difficulties when it came to the production of the guidelines, including that the project was unfunded. She commented that the sign off process for the guidelines took eighteen months, and this was partly due to the retirement of the person she had been working in within the NUJ. After this person retired, no-one else in the NUJ took ownership for the work.

There was also difficulty in how the guidelines were published. James-Hanman faced pressure to get the document to be one-side long, and, when the NUJ did publish the guidance, 'they sort of buried it' with the location they were published on their website. The restrictions on the length of the document was a struggle:

Because you kind of have to explain why something [is wrong]...you're coming up against entrenched attitudes, and you know, you're constantly getting the you know 'we're just trying to make the story entertaining', 'we're trying to grab readers' interest'...it's quite difficult to explain some of the concepts...If you don't have

personal experience of the rape or sexual assault, where are you getting your information from if not the media, and those are the stories the media is telling, which is actually a very distorted picture of the reality

When asked if she felt that journalists were using or taking the guidelines seriously, James-Hanman replied 'no', and called this a 'very real problem', pointing to how the media shapes wider understanding of sexual violence, saying 'that's how the general public understand sexual violence'. She pointed out that, as the public form juries, this affects our criminal justice system: 'they're hearing it through a distorted filter in terms of using their common sense to assess the validity of evidence they're hearing'. She also felt it influenced women's decisions around reporting, as well as rapists' decision to rape, findings echoed in the later chapters of this thesis.

James-Hanman admired the work others had done in the area, such as the Scottish feminist organisation Zero Tolerance, who published their own set of guidance in 2011 (which were not used in this research due to them operating only in Scotland), and established the Write to End VAW Awards (Zero Tolerance, 2015). She commented that the awards system recognising good coverage that Zero Tolerance have set up was positive. In the future, she felt that 'some degree of accountability for individual journalists' was needed, but that this would take a significant amount of resources. Similarly, James-Hanman also felt that there needed to be a better complaint system, where complaints would be upheld, rather than having to challenge individual publications. She also said:

I would like to see, as everybody would, the retraction and apology when the complaint is upheld in the same font size and position [as the original article] (laughs) but hey, a girl can dream!

James-Hanman's discussion of the guidance and the way the NUJ had handled the project makes it clear when the concern for better media coverage was – not with the NUJ, but with someone experienced in the field of violence against women. James-Hanman's account would suggest that the NUJ do not seem to have prioritised the guidelines or made it policy for their members to use them when reporting on violence against women.

With regards to using the guidelines for the analysis of the articles, the relevant guidelines were created as nodes in NVivo, in order to be able code where articles had or had not followed the guidance (so, for example, use of statistics would be coded as such). As well as this, they were also created as attributes. This meant that every article could then be 'scored' based on how many of the fifteen (fourteen from the NUJ guidelines, and an additional analytical code which was added during the coding process) guidelines it had followed. Any instance of having not followed the guidance meant that an article 'lost' that point. This also allowed the researcher to be able to see how many articles had or had not followed guidance (for example, seeing that none of the articles used language such as 'monster' to refer to Evans).

#### 4.3.3 - Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the entire research project was granted by Durham University's School of Applied Social Sciences (now the Department of Sociology) ethics committee. As the media analysis does not involve direct contact with human subjects, the ethical considerations here are minimal. However, when carrying out media analysis of cases of rape, it is important to remember that we are not examining fictional stories, and that our research is, albeit indirectly, involving real people. It is easy to become detached from the reality of the case, but the people in the case are real, and the woman involved is a real victim-survivor. It can be easy to become distant from this idea of the case being 'real-life', as we do not know the woman's name, and Evans' status as a celebrity arguably only grew as a result of the trials. This, combined with the high amount of coverage and the status the case has gained (for example, around the use of sexual history), mean it has, as some of the supporters stated in their interviews, become an example of inequality and disparity in our criminal justice system. But it still remains that a young woman was treated horrifically, whether or not she is legally considered to have been raped. It was incredibly important to me, therefore, to remember that this a real-life case, with real-life implications, particularly for the woman involved, and to treat the data with sensitivity. This was applied practically when it came to the writing up of results by minimising some of the details of the woman's sexual history used in the trial

and reported in the media. This sensitivity to those involved in the media coverage we study is something that has had little to no comment in research so far, but it is recognition that is sorely needed.

## **4.4 - Interviews**

Overall, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of this research. The discussion of these interviews will be broken down into supporters and victim-survivors, although, as the analysis process was the same, the analysis will be discussed dually. Ethical considerations of conducting the interviews will then be discussed.

### **4.4.1 - With Supporters**

#### *4.4.1.1 - Sampling*

Recruitment of participants was carried out through the collaborating partners of the research and existing networks I and my supervisor have within Rape Crisis. An email featuring a recruitment poster (a copy of which is in **Appendix 3**) was sent around two Rape Crisis centres in the North East of England inviting members of staff or volunteers engaged in directly supporting victim-survivors to take part in the research. This recruitment resulted in eight participants, five of whom were employed by their centre, and three who were volunteers. There were a range of roles included in the sample, including counsellor, volunteer coordinator, CEO, practical and emotional support lead, and helpline volunteer. Originally, it was intended that ten supporters would be interviewed. However, as will be explained below, recruitment for victim-survivors was more successful than anticipated, and the decision was made to focus on conducting as many interviews with victim-survivors as possible.

Of the eight supporters interviewed, all identified as white, and seven as female, with one participant identifying as non-binary. The age of participants ranged from 24 to 56, with an average age of 39. Four of the eight supporters identified as heterosexual, with the remaining

three identifying as either lesbian, pansexual or queer, and one preferring not to disclose this information. Five of the supporters identified as having a disability, long-term illness or health condition. A suggestion of this information for future research would therefore be to aim to include supporters from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and to undertake targeted recruitment to meet this.

Of the eight supporters interviewed, seven were previously known to me, either socially or through my own volunteering experiences with Rape Crisis, and I consider these women to be colleagues and friends. I believe that my experiences of working within Rape Crisis were beneficial to their willingness to give up their time to be interviewed, and that my experience highlighted to the supporters that I was not yet another academic interested solely in how they could aid my research, but as someone who genuinely cares and is passionate about the work Rape Crisis do. There are some potentially negative implications involved in interviewing people known to you, such as a risk of over-disclosure and boundaries regarding pre-existing knowledge, and concerns around coercion in participating in the research (McConnell-Henry et al., 2010). However, there are also benefits, such as a stronger rapport (McConnell-Henry et al., 2010), and, as discussed above, greater trust in the researcher. For McConnell-Henry et al (2010: 8), they describe the process of interviewing someone known to you previously as a 'great privilege', a sentiment which I echo, as I feel gratitude for the staff and volunteers who gave up their time to be interviewed.

#### *4.4.1.2 - Conducting the Interviews*

Six of the eight interviews were conducted in the Rape Crisis centres that the supporters either worked or volunteered at, one at a nearby café, and one within university buildings, depending on the preference of the participants. Participants were given a consent sheet beforehand and signed a copy for themselves, and a copy for myself before the interview took place (a blank version can be seen in **Appendix 4**). The first two interviews were treated as pilots and included an extra set of questions to request any feedback the participants had about the structure or wording of the interview. The two participants here expressed no issues with the interview, and no changes were made at this stage. A copy of the interview

guide can be seen in **Appendix 5**. Interviews lasted between around 36 and 80 minutes, with an average length of 48 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded, with the consent of participants, and transcribed before analysis. As the analysis process was similar for both the supporters and the victim-survivor interviews, this will be discussed below.

#### 4.4.2 - With Victim-Survivors

##### 4.4.2.1 - Sampling

Recruitment of victim-survivors was done using two methods. Firstly, during interviews with supporters who worked face-to-face with victim-survivors (e.g. in counselling, so not in services such as helplines), recruitment posters (a copy of which is in **Appendix 6**) for the victim-survivor interviews were provided and the supporters were asked to distribute these amongst the women they supported, at their discretion of who they felt able to share this with. Secondly, a call for victim-survivors interesting in talking about victim-blaming, rape and the media, alongside an image of the recruitment poster, was shared on my own Twitter account. At the time of writing, this had received 151 retweets, with most of these in the hours and days following the posting of the original tweet. According to the Twitter analytics, the tweet made 27,898 total impressions (the number of times people viewed the tweet), with over 1000 total engagements and interactions. There were 393 media engagements (i.e. viewing of the image of the recruitment poster) and 189 clicks onto my Twitter profile through the tweet. This tweet was originally intended to be a 'soft' recruitment, with further strategies expected. However, interest in participating in the research far exceeded expectations (an issue I reflect on towards the end of the chapter), and further recruitment proved unnecessary. This strong interest in participating in the research is despite victim-survivors often being considered as 'hard to reach' (McGlynn and Westmarland, 2019). Overall, fifteen victim-survivors were interviewed, five more than the ten originally planned, and interviews took place in September and October 2017. One participant was previously known to me, but she initiated taking part in the research. This research phase was relatively short due to a planned overseas institutional visit to Australia, which began in November 2017.

Late on the night before the first interview was scheduled to take place, I received an email from the woman who had been due to participate. The interview was set for the following morning in the same building as the local Rape Crisis centre in her area. In her email, she withdrew from taking part in the research, telling me that she had watched an episode of the ITV drama *Liar*, a show that was raised by other victim-survivors, and will be discussed in the findings chapter. Watching this episode had caused her distress, to the point where she felt unable to talk about anything to do with rape the following day. She apologised and told me she had wanted to help but felt unable to after watching the programme. Whilst this was disappointing, I was concerned about the woman, and felt anger at the show for causing her to feel this way. There is also a sense of irony, I feel, in a woman withdrawing from an interview about how the media affects women who have experienced sexual violence, due to engaging with a media portrayal sexual violence.

Fourteen of the fifteen victim-survivors identified as female, with one identifying as non-binary but as more female within this. Therefore, participants will be described as women. The women were between the ages of 21 and 51, with an average age of 33. All the participants identified as white. Five identified as heterosexual, six as bisexual, three as lesbian or gay, and one as pansexual. Seven of the women identified as having a disability, long-term illness or health condition. All of the women interviewed were assaulted by men. As with the supporters, the lack of BME representation is a flaw of the research, and something that future research should endeavour to correct.

#### *4.4.2.2 - Conducting the Interviews*

Of the fifteen victim-survivor interviews, four were conducted in person. These took place in private rooms either in community buildings (including two in a local Rape Crisis centre) or within the university, depending on the preference of the participant. The remaining interviews took place via telephone or Skype. A concern about the safety of using Skype was raised by a fellow researcher on Twitter, after seeing a letter in *Therapy Today* (Goss, 2017) questioning the use of Skype as an appropriate platform for use in online therapy due to concerns about data storage by the company. After reading the aforementioned letter, and

the editor's response, and considering alternatives, it was concluded that Skype was appropriate for this research. This was for a number of reasons, one being that a research interview and therapy are not the same, and the interview would not discuss topics in the same depth and manner as a therapy session. As well as this, there was also the issue of accessibility of other platforms. For example, the letter in *Therapy Today* suggested alternatives, such as VSee, but these, unlike Skype, are not free, nor are they as readily available. Use of this software would therefore require both the researcher and the interviewee to purchase and install the software. As only two interviews were conducted over Skype, this was deemed to be excessive and not particularly accessible for participants, especially compared to the free and popular Skype. Skype's Frequently Asked Questions also states that 'All Skype-to-Skype voice, video, file transfers and instant messages are encrypted' (Skype Help). Therefore, whilst this was a valid concern, in this research it was deemed to be safe and appropriate to conduct interviews via Skype.

Consent was recorded using a consent and information form, and, for the interviews conducted in person, participants were invited to keep a copy of this consent and information sheet (which can be found in **Appendix 4**). For interviews conducted via Skype and telephone, participants were sent the consent and information sheet in advance. Before the interview began, participants were asked if they had had time to look at the consent form prior to the call and, if not, the sheet was read out and verbal consent was given. The consent and information form also highlighted that identifying information would be confidential, unless the participant disclosed something about themselves or another person being at risk of harm. This is discussed by Downes et al. (2014: 4), who state that many research ethics committees require a 'blanket assurance of confidentiality', particularly on what is typically considered to be sensitive research, but that this leaves any disclosures of a participant or someone else being at risk of harm unable to be dealt with by researchers. Downes et al. (2014: 5) state that whilst some researchers work around this by working with complete anonymity (meaning the researcher would be unable to act), this 'amounts to dangerous avoidance of responsibility and lack of care and concern for research participants'. They advocate, therefore, for a balance between promoting openness in interviews, and concern about participants' safety (Downes et al., 2014: 5). Balancing this openness and concern for

safety is something I am practiced in, as this is an essential component of my helpline role with Rape Crisis, where handling safeguarding concerns is not uncommon. Therefore, I felt comfortable taking the approach outlined by Downes et al. (2014), and, had a safety issue arisen, I would have followed safeguarding procedures similar to those in my helpline role, with the addition of discussing the concern with my supervisory team. However, there were no instances where this was necessary.

With the consent of participants, all interviews were audio recorded. For phone interviews, after some testing with the voice recorder and the phone used, this was done with the call on speakerphone, and recorded using the same Dictaphone used for the in-person interviews. In the majority of interviews, this resulted in minimal sound issues when it came to transcription. Phone and skype interviews were conducted in a private room, either at the university or at my home. Interviews ranged from being 13 minutes to 1 hour 35 minutes long, with an average length of 42 minutes.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the guide used can be found in **Appendix 7**. As with the supporter interviews, the first two victim-survivor interviews were treated as pilots, with an additional set of questions at the end asking about the wording and structure of questions. In the second pilot interview, the first and second set of questions were swapped, meaning that instead of first asking about what the participant felt victim-blaming was, she was asked about victim-blaming in the media. However, whilst the participant did not comment on this when asked for feedback at the end of the interview, it felt, to me, uncomfortable to 'dive in' with this more sensitive topic with less time to build rapport.

Therefore, for the rest of the interviews, the order was intended to remain the same as it had in the first interview. In both pilots, feedback was positive, and no changes to the interview guide were made at this point. However, as discussed above, a benefit of semi-structured interviews is flexibility, and this was utilised as the interviews went on. For example, as the interviews progressed, additional questions were added, including where victim-survivors

had heard of victim-blaming, which would potentially influence their understanding of the term (e.g. if they had heard it through feminist activism), and, prior to the questions on coverage of the Ched Evans retrial, if they could remember much about the case. This acted as a screening question, and, if participants did not know the case, I offered a brief overview, and sometimes this recalled memories of the case, enabling a discussion to take place. However, if she could not remember the case, then I usually was able to ask about another high-profile case that she had mentioned previously in the interview (such as Adam Johnson). Similarly, if a woman raised Evans earlier in the interview, depending on what or how much she had said, I sometimes initiated the questions around Evans then, if I felt it would be beneficial to the rapport and flow of the interview. Other questions were sometimes asked in a different order as well, if the participant had raised the issue, and I felt it would be more natural to discuss it then rather than bring it up again later. Another question that was added was asking how participants found doing the challenging of victim-blaming they often told me they were engaged in. This was added as women were often making references to safety work and emotional labour when talking about challenging and resisting victim-blaming, and this challenging was sometimes a direct result of the media coverage that they had seen.

As with the supporters, I feel that my experience as a Rape Crisis volunteer was beneficial to conducting these interviews. Although the interview contained no specific questions asking participants to disclose their own experiences of sexual violence, this, perhaps unsurprisingly, was raised by many of those interviewed. My experiences talking to women on the helpline allowed me to handle these disclosures sensitively and appropriately, whilst ensuring I did not cross boundaries.

#### *4.4.2.3 - Analysing the Interviews*

Analysis of both the supporter and the victim-survivor interviews was conducted using framework analysis. An overview of the analysis method, as well as some of the advantages it offers, and how this method of analysis was applied to the interview data, will be outlined below. The supporter interviews were analysed, and a findings chapter drafted, before moving on to the analysis of the victim-survivor interviews, meaning that, whilst there was

some overlap in terms of themes, analysis of the two sets of interviews was completed separately.

Framework analysis is a method of qualitative data analysis developed by Ritchie and Lewis throughout the 1980s, which aims to offer a method which 'facilitates rigorous and transparent data management' and allows for a systematic approach to conducting analysis (Ritchie et al., 2003: 220). Ritchie et al. (2003: 220) state that 'framework' comes from the term 'thematic framework', which 'is the central component of the method', as this is used to organise the data according to key themes. Each study therefore has main themes, which are broken down by subtopics and are refined during the analysis (Ritchie et al., 2003: 220). It is not aligned with a particular epistemological, philosophical or theoretical approach, nor is it restrained to either inductive or deductive analysis (Gale et al., 2013: 3). It particularly stands out from other methods of qualitative analysis in that it offers a clear set of steps to follow when conducting the analysis, unlike other methods of qualitative analysis such as thematic analysis (Smith and Firth, 2011). These stages enable the researcher to move between the data and refine themes, which can aid the development of a conceptual framework (Smith and Firth, 2011). Srivastava and Thomson (2009: 73) note framework analysis' similarity to grounded theory but argue that framework analysis is better suited to research which has specific questions, a limited time frame, a pre-designed sample, and a priori issues, and that the prime concern of framework analysis is not generating theory but describing and interpreting what is happening.

The five key stages of framework analysis can be summarised as familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; mapping and interpretation (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994).

The first stage, familiarisation, involves, as the name suggests, the researcher becoming familiar with the data by immersing themselves in the transcripts, audio recordings, field notes etc. (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). This allows the researcher to build a feeling of the

data as a whole and is beneficial if the researcher is the only person who collected the data, or is one of a number of people involved in data collection (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994: 129). Ritchie and Lewis (1994) do point out that in some cases, it may be possible to review all of the data, but in many cases this will be unfeasible, and a selection of the data is suitable for this, as long as this selection is diverse. During the familiarisation stage, key recurring themes and ideas are identified (Ritchie et al., 2003).

Within this research, familiarisation was carried out by rereading all of the interview transcripts and, as advocated by Kelly (1988), having listened to the audio recording at least twice. Due to the smaller sample size, all of the transcripts for both the supporters and the victim-survivors were reread. For the supporters, this resulted in a list of 43 key themes that were identified whilst for victim-survivors, this was higher at 73 key themes identified during familiarisation.

Once these key themes and ideas have been noted, this allows for the second stage of identifying a thematic framework to occur. A conceptual framework can then be devised, drawing upon the themes identified during familiarisation and a priori issues, informed by the original aims of the research and introduced using the interview guide (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994: 129). Subthemes are sorted under main themes, and placed within a framework, and some way of distinguishing between these themes is used, such as numbers, or a phrase to 'capture the essence of the theme or subtheme' (Ritchie et al., 2003: 221). Ritchie et al. (2003: 222) also advocate for the inclusion of an 'other' category, both within each main theme and as a theme itself, as they argue that this 'provide[s] an identifier for any uncovered issues that arise within the broad subject area concerned'. Ritchie and Lewis (1994: 129) note that the first version of the index is 'often largely descriptive and heavily rooted in a priori issues' but is then refined by applying the index to the data. Devising and refining an index, they argue, is 'not an automatic or mechanical process, but involves both logical and intuitive thinking. It involves making judgements about meaning...and about implicit connections between ideas', as well as making sure the original research questions are being addressed (Ritchie and Lewis,

1994: 130). Smith and Firth (2011: 5) found in their analysis that the coding index was ‘constantly refined throughout the process of data analysis as new insights emerged’.

The 43 and 73 key themes highlighted during familiarisation were therefore then sorted into a thematic framework. For both the supporters and the victim-survivors, this resulted in eight overall themes. For both groups, some of these themes were based on the wider research questions and the interview guide (such as Defining Victim-Blaming and Consequences of Media), whilst some were formed based on grouping the initial themes, such as Presentations in Media. A table showcasing the thematic framework (with each code numbered, as suggested above) for both sets of interviews can be seen below:

TABLE 1 SUPPORTER INTERVIEWS THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

<b>1.0 Definitions of victim-blaming</b>	<b>2.0 Challenging victim-blaming</b>	<b>3.0 Specialist support services</b>	<b>4.0 Types of Media</b>
<b>1.01</b> victim-blaming beliefs/myths <b>1.02</b> blame on victim <b>1.03</b> blame from perpetrator <b>1.04</b> societal /structural <b>1.05</b> other	<b>2.01</b> on social media <b>2.02</b> with family and friends <b>2.03</b> in the media <b>2.04</b> emotional impact of <b>2.05</b> choosing when to engage/picking battles <b>2.06</b> 'feminist killjoy' <b>2.07</b> challenging self-blame and internalised blaming <b>2.08</b> other	<b>3.01</b> desire to work in a specialist or feminist org <b>3.02</b> nature of support services <b>3.03</b> engagement with media <b>3.04</b> collectiveness of <b>3.05</b> policies and actions of <b>3.06</b> challenging victim-blaming <b>3.07</b> role within <b>3.08</b> other	<b>4.01</b> news media <b>4.02</b> soaps <b>4.03</b> TV drama <b>4.04</b> better sources <b>4.05</b> worse sources <b>4.06</b> local media <b>4.07</b> creating a change in <b>4.08</b> other
<b>5.0 Social Media</b>	<b>6.0 Presentations in media</b>	<b>7.0 Consequences of media</b>	<b>8.0 Other/emerging</b>
<b>5.01</b> as an echo chamber/bubble <b>5.02</b> victim-blaming on <b>5.03</b> as a site of resistance <b>5.04</b> better coverage <b>5.05</b> choosing to engage with <b>5.06</b> other	<b>6.01</b> victims <b>6.02</b> perpetrators <b>6.03</b> women and gender <b>6.04</b> criminal justice system <b>6.05</b> if you could change one thing <b>6.06</b> other	<b>7.01</b> reporting and disclosing <b>7.02</b> identifying sexual violence <b>7.03</b> triggering and retraumatising <b>7.04</b> worries about anonymity <b>7.05</b> choosing not to engage with media <b>7.06</b> volume of media coverage	<b>8.01</b> CSA <b>8.02</b> safety work <b>8.03</b> other

		<b>7.07</b> self-harm <b>7.08</b> lack of warning <b>7.09</b> worried will have same experience <b>7.10</b> courage from seeing others <b>7.11</b> others' reactions/interactions <b>7.12</b> self-blame <b>7.13</b> other	
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TABLE 2 VICTIM-SURVIVOR INTERVIEWS THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

<b>1.0 Definitions of victim-blaming</b>	<b>2.0 Forms of media</b>	<b>3.0 Consequences of media</b>	<b>4.0 Presentations in media</b>
<b>1.01</b> myths <b>1.02</b> victim responsible <b>1.03</b> perpetrator not responsible <b>1.04</b> structural <b>1.05</b> as everywhere <b>1.06</b> undermining the person <b>1.07</b> othering victims <b>1.08</b> hearing about victim-blaming <b>1.09</b> other	<b>2.01</b> social media <b>2.02</b> TV shows <b>2.03</b> news media <b>2.04</b> adverts <b>2.05</b> mainstream media <b>2.06</b> online media <b>2.07</b> other	<b>3.01</b> upsetting <b>3.02</b> triggering <b>3.03</b> questioning own experience <b>3.04</b> disclosing or reporting <b>3.05</b> social life <b>3.06</b> panic <b>3.07</b> self-harm <b>3.08</b> shame <b>3.09</b> anger <b>3.10</b> detachment <b>3.11</b> PTSD <b>3.12</b> self-blame <b>3.13</b> identifying rape <b>3.14</b> fear <b>3.15</b> physical consequences <b>3.16</b> mental health <b>3.17</b> feeling vulnerable <b>3.18</b> memories <b>3.19</b> nightmares <b>3.20</b> other's interactions with <b>3.21</b> other	<b>4.01</b> false allegations <b>4.02</b> reporting & CJS <b>4.03</b> good and bad victims <b>4.04</b> class and race <b>4.05</b> gender and sexuality <b>4.06</b> lack of good outcomes <b>4.07</b> perpetrators <b>4.08</b> victims <b>4.09</b> support information <b>4.10</b> content warnings <b>4.11</b> sexualisation <b>4.12</b> (lack of) own experiences <b>4.13</b> volume of coverage <b>4.14</b> if you could change one thing <b>4.15</b> how could be reported <b>4.16</b> other
<b>5.0 Ched Evans</b>	<b>6.0 Other High-Profile cases</b>	<b>7.0 Challenging Victim-Blaming</b>	<b>8.0 Other</b>
<b>5.01</b> similarities to own case <b>5.02</b> nature of coverage <b>5.03</b> good coverage <b>5.04</b> bad coverage	<b>6.01</b> Adam Johnson <b>6.02</b> Brock Turner <b>6.03</b> Weinstein and #MeToo <b>6.04</b> other celebrities <b>6.05</b> investment in <b>6.06</b> other	<b>7.01</b> media challenging <b>7.02</b> Rape Crisis & Women's Organisations <b>7.03</b> in personal life <b>7.04</b> feelings and safety	<b>8.01</b> feminism <b>8.02</b> media and other issues <b>8.03</b> own experiences <b>8.04</b> other

<b>5.05</b> woman in the case <b>5.06</b> presentation of Evans <b>5.07</b> status of Evans <b>5.08</b> volume of coverage <b>5.09</b> other	.	<b>7.05</b> exposing self <b>7.06</b> activism <b>7.07</b> changing reporting <b>7.08</b> other	
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These themes were then created as nodes in NVivo.

The next stage, that of indexing, sees the thematic framework created in the second stage systematically applied to all of the data (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994). References to the framework (or index) are recorded in the margins of transcripts using either the numerical or phrase-based system mentioned above (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994). This can be done manually, although NVivo is also suitable (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). Ritchie et al. (2003: 224) suggest the use of the term ‘indexing’ over ‘coding’, as indexing shows that a theme or concept is referred to within a particular piece of data, whilst coding ‘refers to a process of capturing dimensions of content that has already been more precisely defined and labelled’, which they argue is too precise for this early stage of analysis. As with the creation of the framework in the second stage, applying the index is not a mechanical task, as it ‘involves making numerous judgements as to the meaning and significance of data’ (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994). This process is subjective, but by annotating the text, Ritchie and Lewis (1994) argue that the process is made visible and accessible to others. It is also possible that the same piece of text can have multiple indexes assigned to it, and, if indexes are often overlapping, it can be a sign of a connection between the themes (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Refinement of the index is also likely to be needed after this application, such as the creation of new main or subthemes (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

The thematic framework shown in the tables above was therefore applied to all of the interview data, using NVivo. As Smith and Firth (2011) also found, the thematic framework was refined during this process, with some new themes added (such as 3.07 – role within specialist support services within the supporter framework). Some also were not employed

as much as anticipated (particularly with the Consequences theme, where some consequences were only reported a small number of times across the fifteen interviews), although they were kept and written up alongside other relevant themes in the findings chapter.

Charting the data follows. This involves the specific pieces of data that have been indexed being arranged in charts of the themes, placed under either the headings and subheadings created during the development of the thematic framework/index, a priori issues or in a way best suited to reporting upon the research (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). This can be done either using index categories, bringing the data together manually or electronically, or through the development of a matrix format (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). NVivo also has a feature available for this purpose, called framework matrices, designed for charting (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). Charting's aim is to 'summarise the context to best retain the context and essence of the point and without losing the language or voice of the respondent' (Ritchie et al., 2003: 231). Ensuring the context remains visible here is key, and Ritchie and Lewis write 'it is perhaps worth reflecting that the 'cut and paste' method which, at one time, was widely used to sort data into subjects holds a real danger of losing the context of location of the material' (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 229). Charting is therefore not about 'cut and paste', but 'abstraction and synthesis', where each passage of text is summarised and entered upon the chart, referencing the original text so the source can be traced (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994: 134). It is also emphasised that the language of the respondent is used, as these have 'both illuminating and explanatory power for later analytical tasks' (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 232. See also Smith and Firth, 2011). They also point out the possibility of data being assigned to multiple locations (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

As mentioned above, NVivo has a feature called framework matrices which aids this stage of the analysis, and this was used when charting the data. Using framework matrices creates a chart, with a cross tabulation between sources of data (in this case, interview transcripts) and nodes. In the table, summaries of what the participant said were written up, drawing upon the language used by the individual.

The final stage is mapping and interpretation. After charting the data, the researcher can identify the key characteristics of the data, and interpret the data as a whole, and this is where, Ritchie and Lewis argue, 'the serious and systematic process of detection now begins', building upon the work done during the indexing and charting (1994: 136). Ritchie and Lewis (1994: 136) write that this is the hardest stage to describe, but that it is not a question of 'aggregating patterns, but of weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues and searching for a structure rather than a multiplicity of evidence'. They therefore offer some examples of how this might look, including defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of the phenomena, creating typologies, finding associations, providing explanations and developing strategies (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994). Smith and Firth (2011: 7) suggest that they interpreted their data by exploring the relationship between core concepts found in their research, the literature and theory. This stage should still aim to reflect participants, as this means that any strategy or recommendations made due to the research echo those who took part (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009).

As Ritchie and Lewis warned above, this is the hardest stage of analysis to describe. However, the best way I found of carrying out the interpretation of the data was to reread the charts created in the previous stage, and to begin the process of writing up. This aided in the weighing up of the issues at hand and finding links between data. By using quotes from participants throughout, this ensured that their voices remained a priority.

It is argued, then, that framework analysis offers a range of benefits for use in research with women who have experienced sexual violence. Firstly, it offers a clear set of steps to follow when conducting the analysis, offering a visible method, which Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argue is essential, especially for early researchers. This is key when considering a lack of transparency associated with other forms of qualitative analysis, such as thematic analysis. Secondly, there is a focus on using the voice and language of the participants of the study in the creating of the thematic framework. This seems particularly pertinent to feminist research, particularly when interviewing women who have experienced sexual violence,

where the aim is to empower and give women a voice. As framework analysis is strongly suited to research on social policy, this also means that policy recommendations and other outcomes from the research can be linked back directly to the voices of those who took part in the research. It is for these reasons that framework analysis was adopted when analysing interview data in this research.

#### 4.4.3 - Ethical Considerations

##### *4.4.3.1 - For Participants*

As with any research method, there are ethical considerations that must be taken into account when conducting semi-structured interviews. As with the media analysis, ethical approval was granted by Durham University's School of Applied Social Sciences ethics committee.

The Economic and Social Research Council, who funded the research, outline six key principles of ethical research (2015). These include that participants should take part voluntarily, free from coercion, and that their rights, dignity and autonomy be respected and protected (ESRC, 2015: 4). Research should also be worthwhile, with value outweighing any risks to both the participants and the researcher, and participants should be given information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research (ESRC, 2015: 4). Participant preferences regarding anonymity should also be respected, and research should be designed to meet standards of integrity, quality and transparency (ESRC, 2015: 4). Finally, research should be independent, with any conflicts of interest explicit (ESRC, 2015: 4). This research strived to meet these principles throughout, offering participants information about the research before they participated. Similarly, the choice to participate was in the control of the women who volunteered to be interviewed by asking them to contact me if they would like to take part. I believe that the research is worthwhile and important, and I was clear about my own position, including my experience as a practitioner. However, there are further ethical issues that were considered, and these will be discussed below.

When interviewing victim-survivors of abuse, there is a risk of causing harm to participants, including that of retraumatisation (Fontes, 2004). Campbell et al. (2010: 61) call taking part in research as a victim-survivor a 'risky proposition', as participants can be reminded of their past experiences. Lee and Renzetti (1993: 6) argue that while any research topic could be sensitive, there are a number of areas where this is to be more likely:

- a) Where research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience,
- b) where the study is concerned with deviance and social control,
- c) where it impinges on the vested interests of powerful persons or the exercise of coercion or domination, and
- d) where it deals with things sacred to those being studied that they do not wish profaned

Fontes (2004) argues that research on violence against women has the potential to fit all four of these criteria. Fonte (2004: 143) suggests that research on violence against women differs from other sensitive topics, as the women who participate in the research 'are speaking out in a societal context of disbelief, fear, and shame', where women are blamed for the violence they suffered.

Letherby (2003: 127) raises the issue of participants becoming distressed during research, pointing out that 'even if the researcher possesses counselling skills, research relationships are not counselling relationships', as was discussed earlier in the chapter when debating the use of Skype for undertaking interviews. This was particularly pertinent for myself, as I was aware I needed to avoid going into 'helpline mode' during interviews, although I could draw upon some of the skills I use in this role, particularly if a participant became upset or was sharing a difficult experience. Similarly, Letherby (2003: 127) suggests that a desire to help respondents could be reflecting our need to 'feel better about the research and our involvement in it, or the need to feel useful', rather than the actual needs of our participants. Letherby (2003) therefore suggests offering a break or providing support information. As participants in this research were spread out across the UK, and I often did not know their exact location, contact information for Rape Crisis England & Wales was kept at hand during interviews, although was not needed.

Campbell et al. (2010: 65) outline six ways of minimising harm when researching victim-survivors. The first of these is that emotional well-being of participants is the 'primary concern', and that, if a participant becomes distressed, then the interviewer should stop, offer comfort and discuss whether they want the interview to continue (Campbell et al., 2010: 65). Secondly, participants should also be given the time to tell their stories, however long this may take, and, thirdly, the interviewer should always show 'patience and respect', and make sure that the participant knows they have control over what they chose to disclose (Campbell et al., 2010: 65). Fourthly, interviewers should also be prepared to answer questions from the participants, and, fifthly, share information with victim-survivors that may help them understand their experiences (Campbell et al., 2010: 65). Finally, 'the emotional tenor of the interview should reflect warmth, compassion and understanding' (Campbell et al., 2010: 65). I sought to follow these principles when conducting my interviews with victim-survivors. When I was asked about my opinions on the topic, I answered. I allowed women to speak freely without forcing them back to the research question, and I did my best to ensure I had offered a warm and supportive space to discuss their experiences and feelings.

One participant became distressed during the research, during an interview conducted in person. No-one interviewed over the phone became, to the best of my knowledge, upset. Kate, who had been recruited through her Rape Crisis counsellor (so was already receiving support) became upset early on in the interview, and as Campbell et al. (2010) suggest above, I offered breaks multiple times, as well as reminding her we could stop the interview at any point if she wanted. However, Kate rejected these every time they were offered, and sometimes joked about being upset. For Kate, it seemed important to contribute to the research, despite the fact she sometimes found it difficult to talk about her experiences. To terminate the interview against her wishes, I felt, would have been undermining her autonomy to decide to take part in the research, although this position might have differed had Kate become significantly more upset during the interview.

Whilst Kate did become upset during the interview, research suggests that, overall, victim-survivors can find taking part in research about violence against women beneficial (Downes

et al. 2014, Campbell et al., 2010). Indeed, one participant emailed me afterwards to thank me for interviewing her, and to say she liked being reminded about how angry she was about the subject, as there is so much that is wrong. Writing on their research on domestic violence, Downes et al. (2014: 4) argue that there are benefits to 'taking part in well designed, safety conscious violence and abuse research', including 'bearing witness...to be living proof that domestic violence and abuse exists, has had real impacts on that person's life, and that they had sought to address these'. Similarly, they suggest that taking part in research can be 'an act of resistance and/or an opportunity to use one's own experience in order to help others' (Downes et al., 2014: 4). In their interviews with 92 victim-survivors, Campbell et al. (2010: 77) found that the participants generally found taking part in research 'helpful, not harmful', and this was linked to the principles of interviewing victim-survivors that were outlined earlier in the chapter. As I did not ask these questions of my own participants, it is not known whether, overall, they found taking part in the research to be helpful or harmful, and it is possible that Kate, despite her upset during the interview, found it overall a positive experience.

#### *4.4.3.2 - For the Researcher*

As outlined by Skinner et al. (2005), and discussed above, the emotional well-being of the researcher is also key in conducting feminist research, and Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) identify doing qualitative research as 'emotion work'. This was considered throughout undertaking the research project. Regular meetings with supervisors were held, and these were planned in advance, as well as being able to contact supervisors in between these meetings via email. Formal support was also available from the collaborating partner Rape Crisis Tyneside & Northumberland, though this was not required. More informal support, however, was provided by my fellow helpline volunteers, and by members of the Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse.

Interviews with Rape Crisis supporters were held within Durham University, the Rape Crisis centre where the participant worked or volunteered, or, in one instance, a local café nearby. All supporter interviews were conducted during standard office hours, and all but one of the

supporters were previously known to me, so concerns around personal safety were minimal for this portion of the research. For the interviews with victim-survivors, eleven of these took place either over the phone or Skype but, for those that did not, either community buildings (such as where the local Rape Crisis centre was based) or locations within Durham University were used, based on the preference of the participant. Interviews conducted in person were done during standard working hours, as suited participants, whilst interviews conducted via phone or Skype were mostly done during working hours, although some were completed outside of these to best suit the participant. Victim-survivor interviews were conducted in September and October 2017, relatively close together, although care was taken not to plan too many on one day. The maximum number of interviews conducted in a single day was three, and this was based solely on the availability of participants, and only occurred once. When conducting multiple interviews in a single day, these were scheduled in order to allow myself time to check in with my own feelings, and take a break before the next interview, as well as to make sure there would be plenty of time for any interview which was longer than anticipated.

I also strongly believe that my practitioner experience was a great benefit to minimising harm to myself during the research. Having this background meant that I was experienced in discussing the topics the media analysis and interviews raised and had a level of emotional resilience that I otherwise may not have had. Whilst the research was, of course, at times emotionally difficult, experience of working in the area plus a good support network ensured my emotional health throughout. There were, however, times when I found the research impacting me. For example, during the data collection for the media analysis research, despite not engaging with articles to keep analysis a separate process, I did at times feel overwhelmed when seeing detailed accounts of abuse, and this became apparent to me when I dreamt a person close to me disclosed abuse. This will be discussed in further detail in my closing reflections of the chapter.

These experiences are not uncommon in those researching violence against women, with Blakely (2007: 61) listing effects including feeling 'anger, sorrow, shock, guilt, loss, pain, fear,

and hope', experiencing nightmares, flashbacks to own experiences and feeling insecure about personal safety as a result of researching sexual violence. Recognising that the research was impacting my emotional health, and the ability to take a break from this portion of the work and focus on something else, ensured I remained dedicated to my own safety throughout the project.

Campbell (2002: 1) has written about her own experiences of researching rape, saying:

I am a researcher who studies rape. That means I think about rape for prolonged periods of time. I read about it, talk about it, write about it, and bear witness to it...It's a rare day that I don't think about rape. There are words and images I wish I could forever purge from my memory, but cannot. I carry them with me, and try to make peace with them and learn from them. I don't think I have ever truly believed that 'I've seen it all' because I know it can always be worse.

However, despite the difficulties, like Griffin and Hamner, Campbell (2002: 11) writes that 'interspersed with the overwhelming anger, fear, loss, and pain was undeniable hope', as well as feelings of compassion, warmth and support. My own feelings when conducting this research will be explored next.

#### **4.5 - Reflections on Conducting the Research**

As outlined by Skinner et al. (2005), reflexivity is a key principle in feminist research. As discussed above, conducting research in the field of violence against women is emotion work.

During the victim-survivor interviews particularly, I at times felt overwhelmed with a sense of responsibility. The women taking part in the interviews had trusted me who, apart from one participant, they did not know, especially given that some of the women told me they had told very few people about what had happened to them. They shared their experiences with me, often telling me details of their own rapes, despite not being prompted to do so. These feelings of being somewhat overwhelmed and responsible began when I first shared my call

for participants on social media. As discussed earlier in the chapter, this resulted in far greater interest than I had imagined would come of my first tweet about the research, and in quite a short period of time. This fast and furious flood of responses was no doubt a contributor to my feelings, but even if interest had been slower, I think (and hope) I still would have felt such a sense of responsibility to do right by the women who gave their voices to this research. Whilst I was obviously thrilled (and felt a sense of validation) that so many other people cared about the research, it has never escaped me how responsible and grateful I am for the women who shared their experiences with me. Similarly, when interviewing women who I consider to be colleagues in the supporter interviews, I hoped to do justice to the important work they do, and to convey their passion for this work. Throughout the interviews, then, I felt responsible to do the best piece of research that I could, for the supporters and victim-survivors that I interviewed, and who gave up their time to take part in the research, and who trusted me with their stories.

These feelings are not entirely brand new to me, although this is the strongest I had felt them. When I first began volunteering with Rape Crisis, I felt a similar feeling of responsibility, and sometimes overwhelmed with the number of women we speak to and support, and how hopeless it can feel at times to work in this sector. Indeed, I still feel this at times now, although thanks to peer support and clinical supervision, this does not usually feel as overwhelming. However, having done this work for the last six years also means that I know the very real difference research and support can make for women, and how we as a sector can create real change, and impact beyond purely academic forms of measurement. It also meant that I had developed my own emotional resilience, and methods of self-care, as well as having an excellent support network around me, made up, in part, of women doing the same work, whether in the third-sector, academia, or both.

I have also touched upon my 'insider' status as a Rape Crisis volunteer when discussing the methods, such as with my sampling strategies and ability to handle disclosures. I feel that this aided my recruitment of supporters, and potentially victim-survivors, too. As well as this, I felt that this offered a sense of legitimacy to my conducting the research. A question I have often

been asked when people learn I either volunteer or study in the field of sexual violence is (usually in shocked or horrified tones) something along the lines of 'why do (or would) you do that?'. Having spent significant time as a helpline volunteer, I felt, highlighted that I was doing the research because I care deeply about ending violence against women, and not because I had spotted a gap in the literature and an opportunity to benefit myself. I thought I would be emotionally prepared for doing the research because of this helpline experience, but in some reflective notes I made about conducting the interviews, I wrote:

Doing this research feels different, as I have actively sought women and asked them to talk to me, rather than providing a service for women to share and receive support on their own terms

I was concerned about 'taking' doing this research, and not giving back or actively providing something for women who have experienced sexual violence, as I am used to doing in my Rape Crisis role. Insider status when conducting qualitative interviews is discussed by Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009), where Corbin Dwyer reflects on her status as an insider when interviewing White parents who adopted children from Asia, and Buckle reflects on her outsider status when researching bereaved parents. Dwyer writes:

As a qualitative researcher I do not think being an insider makes me a better or worse researcher, it just makes me a different type of researcher (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 56)

And this is a sentiment that resonates with me regarding my own status. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 59) argue that there are costs and benefits to having an insider status in qualitative research, contrasting the positive experience of acceptance or access an insider may have with the issue of undue influence on the perspective of the researcher. However, they also comment that 'being an outsider does not create immunity to the influence of personal perspective' (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 59). Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 59) therefore argue that:

We posit that the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience

I therefore adopted this approach of being authentic, open, interested and honest when interviewing my participants. However, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 60) also suggest that the dichotomy of insider versus outsider status is, ultimately, 'overly simplistic', as being an insider does not mean a 'complete sameness', nor does being an outsider denote a 'complete difference' with those being researched.

I mentioned above that I had experienced a nightmare during the data collection and analysis process for the media analysis, and this was one of the effects that Blakely (2007) had listed. Reflecting back on this process, I think that, as with the interviews, I also at times felt overwhelmed, but more hopeless than I did during the interviews. Reading details of rape trials is not easy work, and, despite knowing the statistics around who is most likely to commit rape (i.e. someone known to you), I felt a heightened awareness of my own safety at points during the research, and I think doing the media analysis affected my overall mood. Not only did I feel affected by the details of the cases I was either collecting or analysing data for, but I also felt anger at the coverage of these cases, and imagining how this would affect victim-survivors, the general public and potential perpetrators (or, indeed, those who had already committed rape).

Whilst many of the ways doing the research affected me were negative, like Griffiths and Hanmer (2005) and Campbell (2002), reflecting on this towards the end of the project, I maintain my sense of hope that we can create change in this area. Perhaps this is an emotional necessity when working in the field of violence against women, but, I still feel this hope, and I plan to stay working towards ending violence against women.

#### **4.6 - Summary**

This chapter has explored the methodological considerations in undertaking this piece of research. There has been a detailed explanation of the processes behind the sampling, conducting and analysing of the media research and the two different sets of interviews conducted, as well as an exploration of ethical concerns. The chapter also explored feminist

approaches to research, including semi-structured interviews, and how these can be used when interviewing women who have experienced sexual violence. The chapter concluded with some of my own reflections of conducting the research.

## Chapter 5 – Analysis of a High-Profile Rape Trial

### 5.1 - Introduction

High-profile cases of rape are one way that victim-survivors of sexual violence and support workers may encounter a significant amount of media coverage. The interest in, status of and therefore newsworthiness of sportspeople, combined with reporting around sexual violence, creates a perfect storm in which cases receive particularly heavy coverage. Therefore, this chapter examines the news coverage of the retrial of Ched Evans, a footballer, who was ultimately found not guilty of raping a woman in Rhyl, North Wales in October 2016, which was analysed using guidance produced for journalists reporting on violence against women by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). It will begin with an overview of Ched Evans' case, offering a timeline of the key events, before moving on to discuss the results of the analysis, using subheadings based on the guidance offered by the National Union of Journalists.

### 5.2- The Case of Ched Evans

On the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2011, Ched Evans and fellow footballer Clayton McDonald were arrested on suspicion of sexual assault in Rhyl, North Wales. At the time, Evans was playing for Sheffield United, and had played for the Welsh national team, whilst McDonald was playing for Port Vale. On the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2011, they were formally charged with raping a woman in a room in a Premier Inn hotel, booked under Evans' name in Rhyl after Evans and McDonald had been on a night out together. McDonald met the woman for the first time at a takeaway, where she had fallen over, and took her to the hotel room. Evans joined them after receiving a text from McDonald stating 'I've got a bird', and whilst Evans' brother and friend filmed from the window outside the hotel room (Press Association, 2016). The woman maintains she remembers nothing of the night by this point, and the next thing she remembers is waking up alone in the hotel room bed (Nelson, 2016). Evans and McDonald were arrested the same day, and charged with rape in July 2011 (Nelson, 2016).

The trial took place in April 2012, and CCTV footage was shown of the woman stumbling and unable to stand. The prosecution argued that the woman was too drunk to have been able to consent to sex. During the trial, it was revealed that Evans had never actually spoken to the woman before having sex with her, and it was McDonald who had asked the woman 'Can my mate join in?' (Press Association, 2016). On April 20<sup>th</sup>, McDonald was found not guilty, whilst Evans was found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison (Doward, 2014). Both during and after the trial, the woman was named online and faced a range of other abuses on social media, and police confirmed at a Welsh Women's Aid conference that she had received a relocation package and new identity following this online naming and abuse (Malone, 2012). Nine people, including a cousin of Evans', were found guilty of naming the woman at Prestatyn magistrates' court, and ordered to pay her £624 each (Malone, 2012).

Evans sought and was refused leave to appeal in August 2013. He hired a new legal team, and in July 2014, launched another appeal through the Criminal Cases Review Commission. His campaign, which included hiring private investigators and a leading appeals barrister, was funded by his partner's father, and included a website which offered a £50,000 reward for any information which would help free Evans (Doward, 2014; Press Association, 2016). He was released from prison in October 2014, after serving two and a half years of his sentence, and soon after a spokesperson from the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) told *The Observer* they were fast-tracking his review after a request from Evans' legal team (Doward, 2014). In October 2015, his case was referred to the Court of Appeals, and heard in March 2016. On April 21<sup>st</sup>, Evans' conviction was quashed, based on evidence that had not been heard at the original trial, and a retrial was ordered (Court of Appeal, 2016). During this time, it was reported Evans would resume training with Sheffield United, but this offer was rescinded after an outcry from the public, sponsors, patrons and high-profile fans, although he later signed with the lower status League One Club Chesterfield in June 2016 (BBC, 2017).

The retrial began on October 4<sup>th</sup> 2016, lasting two weeks. New evidence was heard from two men who the woman had had sex with before and after the alleged rape, who both stated that her behaviour with them was very similar to way Evans stated she behaved. The woman's

sexual history was explored in great detail, down to the language and phrases she used, and the positions taken (Press Association, 2016). Prosecution again argued that the woman was too drunk to have consented. Evans was found not guilty on October 14<sup>th</sup> (Crown Prosecution Service, 2016). Meanwhile, in May 2017, it was announced that Evans had been signed to play once again for Championship team Sheffield United on a three-year contract (BBC, 2017).

### 5.3 - Findings

The results of the media analysis, broken down by each NUJ recommendation, will be explored. Each section will therefore start by quoting the guidance outlined by the NUJ, before discussing how this was found to apply to the data in this case, and relevant literature.

On average, 7.8 of the 15 guidelines were broken per article, though this varied between publications. For example, *Sun* broke the most guidelines on average, with 9.1 broken per article. The best performing publications were *Buzzfeed* and *Guardian*, who broke 6 and 6.1 guidelines per article respectively. *Daily Mail* was the second-worst performer, with 8.7 guidelines broken on average per article, followed by *Telegraph* at 8 per article. *BBC* and *Huffington Post* each broke 7.3 of the 15 guidelines per article, whilst *Metro* broke 7.5. The highest scoring (and therefore worst in terms of breaking the guidance) article was in the *Daily Mail*, breaking 13 of the 15 guidelines, whilst the best was in *Huffington Post*, breaking only 2 of the 15 guidelines.

#### 5.3.1 - Include Helpline and Support Information

Include helplines at the end of articles or broadcasts and include all jurisdictions information where appropriate (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, etc.) (NUJ, 2013: 1)

Out of the 204 articles included in this sample, only two included information for support, and of these, one was referring to the writer's own coaching organisation, and the other included the national numbers for the Rape Crisis (which supports women and girls) and Survivors UK

(which supports men and boys) helplines. Both of these articles were published in the *Huffington Post*.

We know that sexual violence has long term consequences for survivors, such as flashbacks, and that there are many benefits to the use of a specialist support service, such as Rape Crisis centres. Campbell (2006) found that specialist advocates led to improved outcomes for survivors, including feeling less distress during contact with the legal system. In their study of five Northern Rape Crisis centres, Westmarland and Alderson (2013: 3275) found that before engaging with these specialist services, 61% felt they were unempowered and lacked control over their lives. By the last data collection point, this had reduced to 31%. Similarly, there was a 27% reduction in reporting of experiencing flashbacks, a 25% reduction in experiencing panic attacks, a 16% fall in experiencing suicidal feelings and a 10% drop in the use of self-harm from the first and last data collection points (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013: 3275). Despite this, based on data from the US, Ullman and Townsend (2007: 413) argue 'a relatively low proportion of survivors' are accessing specialist sexual violence services.

Therefore, the inclusion of this information and the signposting to specialist support services is incredibly important, as it could prompt someone to seek support, and was included in only 0.98% of the articles in this sample.

### 5.3.2 - Do Not Blame Religion or Culture

Do not blame religion or culture for gender-based violence and do not assume that one religion or culture is more inclined than others. Represent gender-based violence as a cross-cultural phenomenon with no geographical or cultural boundaries (NUJ, 2013: 2)

Whilst this guideline may be instructing journalists not to report rape by writing as if it is an issue specific only to certain religions or cultures, this analysis used a broader sense of the term 'culture' than the one suggested in the guidance. This involved taking it to include culture around sports, especially football, given the emphasis placed on sports culture within

the sample, so as to capture this element of the coverage. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is a difference between recognising how aspects of sporting culture may be supportive of sexual violence, and the blaming of specific religions or cultures which serves to other sexual violence, and suggest that it only takes place within these cultures. This research therefore does not seek to undermine the importance of the guidelines instructing journalists not to blame specific religions or cultures for sexual violence.

Nineteen of the articles blamed, in some way, culture, including sports culture, and a small number referred to 'drinking culture' (for example 'Whatever the feminist online lynch mob say, Ched Evans is innocent. But Britain's Saturday night binge-culture is as guilty as sin' [*Daily Mail*, 17/10/2016] and 'The protective mother revealed she is 'terrified' for her children because of drinking culture' [*Sun*, 17/10/2016]). Only one article referred a culture outside of this:

While the lynch mob was baying for Ched Evans's blood, eight members of a Pakistani sex-abuse gang were convicted on Monday of horrific, violent acts against teenage girls in Rotherham. Sageer Hussein told his 13-year-old victim: 'All white girls are good for is sex and they are just slags'... Since the convictions, have we heard anything from Women Against Rape and other pressure groups about the 'rape culture' endemic among Rotherham's feudal misogynists? Any online petitions? Any word from prominent virtue-signallers indicting the disgusting mores of the minicab community? Good heavens, no. So much easier and more therapeutic to rant about one white footballer who behaved sleazily in a Premier Inn in Rhyl than to contemplate the vast, unspeakable threat from a priapic, patriarchal culture that treats white girls as easy meat. (*Daily Telegraph*, 18/10/2016)

The other articles referred to comments made by Evans in his police interview, where he stated he 'could have had any girl', that women 'throw themselves at him', and that 'footballers are rich, they have got money and that's what girls like', highlighting a sense of entitlement. During the retrial, Evans admitted these comments were 'cringe-worthy' and stated that footballers were not entitled to anything. This produced headlines such as:

'I'VE HAD A THREESOME BEFORE. THE GIRLS LIKE IT' 'Rapist footballer' Ched Evans told police girls threw themselves at footballers because they're rich (*Sun*, 6/10/2016)

Ched Evans rape trial: Footballer 'could have had any girl' (*BBC*, 6/10/2016).

After the trial, these comments were subject to more coverage, including from the *BBC* who quoted a criminologist saying 'There is a sense that power, status and wealth gives you a moral monopoly on behaviour...it is easy to access and impress young women who look up to you, and take advantage of that wealth and status' (*BBC*, 16/10/2016). The *Daily Telegraph* published the headline "Team Ched' show just how sick football culture in Britain is' (14/10/2016), whilst the *Guardian* went with 'The Ched Evans case shines a light on football's dark corners' (17/10/2016).

The above therefore links to feminist discussions of sport culture around the power that athletes may have. For example, Waterhouse-Watson (2016a: 70) has written about footballers being granted 'a higher status than mere mortals – objects of worship, whose failings can be excused', or, conversely, footballers being infantilised so they are not responsible for their actions, particularly sexual violence, granting them the ability to not be held responsible for their actions. Similarly, Flood and Dyson (2007) suggest that the celebrity status of athletes has led to a lack of accountability, including legal accountability. This includes more sympathy for the perpetrator (discussed below), and their ability to hire more experienced legal counsel (Flood and Dyson, 2007), which was also relevant in this case as Evans hired a new legal team to represent him at the retrial. Messner (1990: 214) has called sports an important 'organising institution' for hegemonic masculinity, with the framing of sports uniting men in the domination of women (1990: 215). Benedict (1997) has called out an industry which allows violent men to continue to play sports as long as they are successful on the field. Brooks-Hay and Lombard (2018) suggest that further work is needed to understand how this culture is linked to the perpetration of abuse. In this coverage, both Evans and sports culture were discussed with hostility, and sports culture appeared to be viewed as responsible for creating a culture which facilitated Evans' behaviour.

### 5.3.3 - Frame as Violence Against Women

Frame violence against women and girls (VAWG) as a gender equality and human-rights abuses rather than as a 'mishap', a 'bad relationship' or as the consequence of women undertaking activities that would be unremarkable for men (walking alone, being out after dark, drinking in a bar, etc.) (NUJ, 2013: 1)

Only two articles in the sample framed the discussion around the rape trial as an issue of violence against women. Even then, this was not a strong link. For example, one of the two articles ran the headline 'The Ched Evans case sends a chilling message to women: don't report rape' (*Daily Telegraph*, 15/10/2016). The second article quoted from women's organisations such as the End Violence Against Women Coalition and Women Against Rape (*Guardian*, 17/10/2016).

This is not the first instance of news coverage not recognising violence against women. Meyers (1997: 66) found that coverage of domestic violence often presented incidents as isolated and separate, and this, she argues, 'relieves the larger society of any obligation to end it'. Bullock and Cubert (2002) had similar results. In terms of sexual violence, Soothill and Walby (1991: 36) have suggested that the media are 'very loath to consider' it as being related to men and women's position in society. Benedict (1992: 266) writes that 'rape cannot be understood without mentioning women's position and the way men are trained to see them'. Benedict (1992) also noted a lack of coverage linking rape to men's violence against women in her research on four high profile cases of rape.

Feminist academics have written about the importance of recognising rape as a form of men's violence against women. For this case to not be framed as violence against women, then, is, as Westmarland (2015: xv) argues, missing the joining the 'dots' between forms of men's violence against women and recognise that these are linked to gender inequalities. Similarly, Romito (2008: 45) has written about talking about violence against women without referring to male violence. The reporting of rape as men's violence against women is therefore a key issue. If reporters wrote about rape in this wider context, it would lead to a more responsible

reporting of sexual violence overall, with many of the other guidelines discussed here ‘falling into place’.

#### 5.3.4 - Avoid Negative Gender Stereotypes

Have regard for women as individuals and avoid media reporting which reinforces negative gender stereotypes (NUJ, 2013: 1).

This was included as one of the ‘key issues’ set out at the beginning of the NUJ document and, for the most part, articles in this sample followed the advice: 181 articles avoided the use of negative gender stereotypes, whilst 23 did not.

Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 20) has written about the different stereotypes of women presented in rape trials of footballers that are used to undermine the woman in the trial: the Gold Digger, the Woman Scorned, the Party Girl, the Groupie and the Predatory Woman. The woman at the centre of the Evans case was presented as most of these stereotypes at different points over the course of the retrial (with the exception of the Predatory Woman). Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 20) argues that each of these stereotypes replaced the ‘character’ of the Raped Woman in the narratives surrounding these trials and are so embedded within the collective cultural consciousness that they can be drawn upon unconsciously by a writer.

For the gold digger stereotype, Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 20) describes this as the woman who ‘makes a false complaint for money’. Writing before Evans’ retrial, Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 21) referred to the claims of Evans’ supporters that the woman was a Gold Digger. Surrounding the retrial, this stereotype was again perpetuated by Evans’ supporters, and was found in articles that quoted posts from social media. An article published by *Buzzfeed* included tweets that said:

The cow that falsely accused Ched Evans should be fuckin hung, evil cow looking for a payout

How about that slut gives back all the millions she's cost Ched Evans? #tramp (social media posts quoted in *Buzzfeed*, 14/10/2016).

Another article in the *Guardian*, on why anonymity for rape suspects is damaging, discussed these stereotypes, including the Gold Digger, quoting a post calling the woman a 'money-grabbing whore' (18/10/2016). Similarly, one article challenged the Gold Digger image:

Her reputation was torn to shreds following Evans's charge and conviction. She was attacked as a 'gold-digger' – though she has never actually claimed she had been raped.

and:

She could make money now by selling her story. But through North Wales police she has made it clear she is 'definitively adamant' that she will not talk to the media. (*Guardian*, 14/10/2016)

With regards to the Party Girl stereotype, this can be seen clearly throughout the coverage, in reference to the woman's drinking and the discussion of her sexual history, and Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 24) defines this stereotype as a woman who 'who is out to have a good time, consume large quantities of alcohol and is therefore also out for sex'. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, that the woman had had sex with men she met on nights out, and how much she had drunk was widely reported on:

On Wednesday, a man, who cannot be identified, told the jury he had sex with the woman five or six times. He said they had sex on the weekend of the alleged rape and that she was drunk. 'She started instigating sex. She was coming on to me,' he said. 'We began to have sex. She dictated how it went about. It was a bit of a shock to me.' (*Guardian*, 12/10/2016)

On each occasion the woman had been drinking heavily and the sex occurred in a very specific way - including the words she used to encourage her partner. (*BBC*, 14/10/2016)

The first man told the court she had sex with him after drinking heavily but could not remember the day after, while the second called her a 'confident sexual partner'. (*Daily Mail*, 14/10/2016)

She told police she had tried the drugs before, but had not taken them recently. She said she had drunk two large glasses of wine on the night along with four vodkas and a sambuca. (*Sun*, 6/10/2016)

The Woman Scorned (Waterhouse-Watson, 2013: 20) is described as making 'a false complaint for revenge'. This was hinted at throughout the coverage, especially as, in his evidence, Evans had described the woman as having a 'huff' after he stopped having sex with her. When asked why he had done this, Evans said it became more real he was cheating on his girlfriend, saying 'I pulled away. She grabbed the quilt and pulled it over herself and huffed'. This was quoted in the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Sun*. Evans here called on this stereotype in his telling of the events. Woman Scorned was also found in the articles that quoted posts from social media:

Ched Evans has lost 5 years of his career because a dirty little bitch that he probably pissed off said he raped her? (social media post quoted in *Sun*, 14/10/2016)

Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 20) describes the Groupie as 'a football fan who is always sexually available to any and all footballers'. She goes on to argue that a Groupie is 'essentially portrayed as unrapeable', due to being defined as consenting to sex with any footballer, revoking her right to consent (2013: 22). In this trial, this was highlighted through the woman's consent to sexual activity with Clayton McDonald, who was found not guilty of rape

in the first trial. Evans also referred to this in his police statement, which received significant coverage, when he stated that girls throw themselves at footballers, and enjoyed threesomes with him and McDonald because 'they've got two footballers there'. A *Daily Mail* article referred to the woman in the case and other woman as Groupies (and also hinting at Woman Scorned) by saying:

Still, one could weep for the girls who scramble after these footballers, who tryst with them in budget hotel bedrooms and fondly imagine that these grisly couplings somehow mean something. (*Daily Mail*, 16/10/2016)

Other examples of gender stereotypes related to the idea that the woman in the case was lying, with articles quoting either a witness in the trial, who stated in court he believed the woman was lying, or using posts on social media. *Buzzfeed* published an article that was mostly made up of these posts, with many claiming the woman should be jailed (some even calling for her to be hung, drawn and quartered), calling her a 'slag', 'whore', 'cunt' and 'dirty little bitch' in the process. Posts quoted included saying how the woman had ruined Evans' life and ended his career.

Bitch who lied about ched Evans should get hanged. Worst kind of cunt.

The woman who claimed she got raped by Ched Evans should be hung drawn and quartered the stupid little slag (social media posts quoted in *Buzzfeed*, 14/10/2016)

Whilst *Buzzfeed* is itself not endorsing these views, there was little challenging of the posts quoted in the article, other than describing them as 'harassment'. Whilst this therefore differs from some of the other negative gender stereotypes found in the articles, in that the journalist is not writing them, the inclusion of abusive social media posts (particularly when these form the majority of an article, such as with the *Buzzfeed* article) requires the journalist to explain *why* the posts are abusive or harassing. This is something that publications need to ensure is clear when quoting from social media as otherwise, by not challenging such attitudes, journalists are at risk of perpetuating them.

Olympic athlete Jessica Ennis-Hill also faced abuse after the verdict was returned. In 2014, Ennis-Hill said she would want her name removed from a Sheffield United stand if the club were to sign Evans. Articles quoted some of the gendered abuse she received, including being called a 'whore', 'annoying bitch' and a 'slut'. Articles also quoted tweets telling Ennis-Hill she owed Evans an apology for 'tarnishing Evans' name'. As above, whilst these posts included in articles are not necessarily journalists endorsing the attitudes found within them, journalists could be clearer in making this explicit and challenging the attitudes, such as by including relevant factual information.

The abuse women face online is a growing area of literature. Often named 'trolling', Lumsden and Morgan argued in 2012 that previous academic discussion has lacked a gendered analysis, especially in terms of who perpetrates and who is the victim of online abuse. Cole (2015: 356) has since argued that this online abuse is a way to discipline women speaking out in public, especially if they are feminist. This can be applied to the abuse Ennis-Hill faced when she spoke out. Mantilla (2013: 564) argues that 'gendertrolling', unlike other forms of trolling, is not only designed to upset the targets of the behaviour, but it 'also often expresses sincere beliefs held by the trolls'. With regards to the abuse faced by the woman at the centre of the trial, this highlights others' beliefs and thoughts about rape, highlighting the need for media coverage to follow other NUJ guidelines, such as the inclusion of educational materials, framing as violence against women, and use of up to date statistics.

### 5.3.5 - Do Not Sexualise Women and Girls

Take care not to contribute to the sexualisation of women and girls in the media (NUJ, 2013: 1).

This was a key issue in the guidelines, and, out of the 204 articles in this sample, 157 followed this guidance. This means that 47, almost one-quarter, did not. This is particularly important in this case, due to the ruling during Evans' appeal to allow new evidence in the form of testimony from two of the complainant's former sexual partners to be heard. This new

evidence, and therefore the woman's sexual history, was a great focus of coverage of the retrial, and was reported on in detail. In particular, a lot of attention was given to the language the woman used – Evans stated she had asked him to 'fuck me harder', and the new evidence was allowed on the basis she had used this or similar language with two other men. One witness had had sex with the woman prior to the alleged rape, and another afterwards. The press therefore shared not only Evans' account of sex with the woman, but two other men's as well, and reported on this in a manner which painted a picture of a sexually experienced, confident woman in control of sex.

Soothill and Walby (1991: 3) highlighted that coverage of sexual violence is often 'sensationalist and titillating', squeezing 'all manner of sexual detail' into articles, including the sexual history of the woman involved. They write that 'typically, the sexual conduct of a woman is an excuse legitimising male violence...In contrast sexual activity by men is rarely seen as problematic' (1991: 58), and this certainly appears to be the case with the Evans retrial. A *Daily Mail* headline stated that 'Woman 'who was raped by Ched Evans demanded rough intercourse from the footballer and asked him to perform sex act on her'', whilst a *Daily Telegraph* headline reported her as having '[taken] the lead' and appeared to be 'enjoying herself'. Referring to the witness who had had sex with the woman before the incident, the *Sun* had "ARE YOU GOING TO RIP MY CLOTHES OFF? Ched Evans' alleged victim told another lover 'she wanted to 'tear him apart' during sex two days before attack', whilst in the body of the article, it quoted the witness describing the 'numerous positions' they had sex in. Similarly, Soothill and Walby (1991: 147) suggest that in contested cases such as this one, women are either portrayed as 'a whore or a virgin', but in either scenario, she is ultimately 'portrayed as 'asking for it''. This dichotomy has been written about by others, such as Benedict (1992: 18), who argues that as a result of rape myths, victims in trials are presented either as 'virgins' – 'she is pure and innocent, a true victim attacked by monsters' – or 'vamps', 'a wanton female who provoked the assailant with her sexuality'.

This reporting not only sexualises the woman involved, meaning that the public had access to details about her sex life, but also serves to undermine the woman – if she had consented to

rough sex with one man, then why not Evans as well? The amount this was covered by the press absolutely, it is argued, falls into the 'sensationalist and titillating' category that Soothill and Walby describe.

### 5.3.6 - Do Not Excuse the Perpetrator

Avoid comments which could be interpreted as making excuses for the abuser, such as commenting on his remorse, or suggesting that the way women dress or behave incited the incident (NUJ, 2013: 2)

In this sample, 77 articles excused Evans in some way. This was done through creating sympathy for him, as other methods were coded as blaming the victim. Evans and Massey's reaction to the verdict was widely reported on:

There were gasps and cries in the public gallery when the verdict was read out, with members of Mr Evans's group, including his fiancée Natasha Massey, breaking down.

Mr Evans was then discharged from the dock and embraced Natasha. (*BBC*, 14/10/2016)

The article in which the quote below featured was actually overall critical of Evans, branding him immoral, but still presented a dramatized and sympathetic version of this moment:

Under different circumstances, the scene might have been quite touching. The wronged professional footballer, his reputation restored after five years of hell, falling into the arms of the fiancée who'd stood by him, and the pair dissolving into tears.

(*Daily Mail*, 14/10/2016)

Similarly, this was also often done through reference to Evans' fiancée and son, and the effect the trial and his imprisonment had had on them as a family. The interview with Massey published in the *Daily Telegraph* discussed her decision to stay with Evans after the allegations:

By the time she got home, Natasha had decided to stand by her man. 'I know he can be an idiot, and he behaved appallingly [on that night], no doubt about that, but rape?

No. He hasn't got it in him. Do you honestly think I could love someone who could do that, Allison?' (*Daily Telegraph*, 21/10/2016)

Massey continued to excuse Evans, presenting him as a family man:

Not for a second, she says, did she ever think that Ched had actually raped someone. 'He couldn't. I mean the only people who think Ched is a rapist are people who haven't met him. He's a big softie. Everyone who knows Ched can see why I've stood by him. It's the people that don't know Ched have got this [terrible] opinion of him. My friends have said, I don't understand why they're writing these things. He's a family person, he always puts everyone else first and he's kind.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 21/10/2016)

Taylor (2009: 43) found in coverage of femicides that perpetrators were often presented 'as victims themselves', and this can clearly be seen in the quotes above, where Evans is presented as an innocent victim in the case. The methods used to do this are similar to Waterhouse-Watson's (2016b) finding in her study of coverage of Australian footballer Brett Stewart's rape trial, where she found that much of the reporting focused on the emotion of Stewart or his girlfriend. She also notes that this was done in combination with descriptions that 'appear inconsistent with the demeanour of a rapist' (2016b: 8), also featured here:

The former Wales and Manchester City forward, who fought a five-year battle to clear his name, broke down in tears and hugged his partner Natasha Massey following the verdict at Cardiff Crown Court. (*Sun*, 14/10/2016)

As we can also see above, articles referred to Evans' 'battle':

SHAMED STAR'S ASTONISHING FIGHT (*Sun*, 14/10/2016)

It brings to an end a five-year ordeal for the soccer player since the night at the Premier Inn in May 2011 (*Daily Telegraph*, 15/10/2016)

The Wales international footballer was acquitted of rape on Friday following a five-year battle to clear his name (*Guardian*, 15/10/2016).

Benedict (1992) mentioned a similar finding in her study of a gang rape, where two men were found guilty, and two not guilty. She quotes a newspaper article that states the two men found not guilty were given a 'heroes' welcome', with the verdict eliciting sympathy for all of the defendants (1992: 131). Those found not guilty, then, are assumed to be innocent and, as such, are seen as innocent victims of the criminal justice system.

### 5.3.7 - Make the Perpetrator Visible

Make the perpetrator visible in your report (e.g. women do not 'get themselves raped') (NUJ, 2013: 2).

This was applied in the analysis of the articles to examine whether action was assigned to Evans - was he, for example, reported to have raped the woman, or was he reported to be simply on trial? In this sample, 83 articles did not make Evans visible as a perpetrator. This was done in two key ways from the beginning to the end of the period the sample was collected: the first was to refer to the trial as 'Ched Evans rape trial', without acknowledging that Evans himself was the one on trial for rape. The *BBC* did this several times in their headlines:

Ched Evans rape trial jury sworn in (*BBC*, 4/10/2016)

Ched Evans rape trial: Footballer's alleged victim 'lying' (*BBC*, 11/10/2016).

However, they were not alone in this:

Why can't we know the victim's name in the Ched Evans rape trial? (*Sun*, 7/10/2016)

Sexual history evidence in Ched Evans rape trial causes concern for Vera Baird (*Daily Mail*, 15/10/2016).

Some did not even mention what Evans was on trial for:

Footballer Ched Evans arrives for retrial at Cardiff Crown Court (*Daily Mail*, 13/10/2016).

Whilst Evans is still reported as being on trial, he is not being assigned the action of rape. It is a form of linguistic avoidance, in which ‘perpetrators of violence against women and children – men -disappear’ (Romito, 2008: 45).

The second way was by assigning action to the woman in the case. This was also done by use of ‘accuser’ (discussed in more detail later) – instead of Evans being a rapist, action was assigned to the woman who had ‘accused’ him of rape. This happened numerous times, during and after the trial. Examples of it in headlines include:

Woman who accused Ched Evans of rape ‘asked him for rough sex’ (*Metro*, 5/10/2016)

Woman who accused Ched Evans of rape left ‘destroyed’ as she collapses during three hour evidence grilling (*Sun*, 15/10/2016)

Social media naming of Ched Evans's accuser raises legal questions (*Guardian*, 14/10/2016).

It also occurred in the main text of articles:

THE dad of the woman who accused Ched Evans of rape has said it was like his daughter was the ‘one on trial’ (*Sun*, 15/10/2016)

The woman who accuses Ched Evans of rape messaged a former lover on Facebook the day after the alleged incident (*Daily Mail*, 12/10/2016).

Here, Evans is passive – the action of being accused of rape was done *to* him. He became the victim. This is yet another way of hiding the perpetrator of the violence (Romito, 2008).

### 5.3.8 - Do Not Refer to Perpetrators as 'Monster'

Do not refer to abusers as 'monsters', 'fiends', 'maniacs' or 'beasts' as this creates the myth that abusers are noticeably and substantially different from 'normal' men (NUJ, 2013: 2)

None of the articles in this sample used this language to describe or identify Evans. Instead, Evans was presented as being highly immoral – this will be discussed under the following guideline. The closest the publications came to calling Evans a 'monster' was the *Sun* branding him a 'slimeball', but this was ultimately coded as presenting him as immoral.

There are several possible reasons that Evans was able to avoid this labelling. One could be Evans' celebrity status. This may have meant that writers and publications were wary of calling Evans this inflammatory language, especially given he had the financial backing of his fiancée's father and had previously threatened legal action. This is not to say that celebrities are immune to this; Jimmy Savile has been cast as a monster for the prolific sexual abuse he committed, although it must be noted that this was by no means immediate, and developed over time, requiring many women to come forward before widespread opinion began to shift (Boyle, 2018). Evans does not have the same notoriety that Savile has come to have.

Another reason is that Soothill and Walby (1991: 146) argue that the construction of the creation and hunt for a 'sex fiend' itself emphasises cases where the perpetrator is unknown. Evans was known to the police early on in the process, and there was no 'hunt' for him. As well as this, Soothill and Walby (1991: 146) point out that this 'sex beast' imagery largely disappears during the trial stage of cases, with focus shifting onto the victim-survivor in the case at this point. This appears to be the case with the coverage here; Evans was not constructed as a monster, and, as the trial went on and evidence was heard from the two witnesses who had had sex with the woman, he became less important.

### 5.3.9 - Name Acts Accurately

Name violence against women as violence against women (e.g. domestic violence is not a 'volatile relationship'). Do not use the word sex when you mean rape (NUJ, 2013: 1)

A total of 181 of the 204 articles included in this sample did name the acts they were reporting on accurately. This could be because the coverage was reporting a trial, and not at another stage of the criminal justice system, such as when the charges were first brought against Evans. In these articles, the incident was referred to as 'rape', although this did not serve as an indicator that the article was overall a good example of reporting on sexual violence.

In the articles that did not name rape accurately, phrases such as 'romp' or 'sex attack' were often used. For example:

Evans...is facing a retrial over allegations that he carried out the sex attack on the complainant (*Huffington Post*, 6/10/2016)

He had maintained his innocence from the very outset – saying the woman had invited him to 'join in' a 4am romp with a fellow footballer (*Sun*, 14/10/2016)

This type of language conflates rape with consensual sex.

Harrington (2016) found similar results when researching the reporting of the rape allegations of Julian Assange. She found language such as 'sexual impropriety', which, she argues, trivialises the allegations (2016: 9). This is similar to Braber's (2014) findings on the reporting of domestic violence in the *Sun* and *Guardian* – two of the newspapers included in this sample. Whilst she found that 60% of *Guardian* articles, and 40% of *Sun* articles used the term 'domestic violence', this was part of her search terms using LexisNexis, so this might be expected. However, she also found that the papers, and the *Sun* in particular, used language to trivialise and diminish the abuse, such as 'A loofah's tiff' and 'domestic dispute' (2014: 100). Similarly, in a study looking at coverage of fatal domestic violence, Gillespie et al. (2013: 233) found that many did not classify the murder as domestic violence, and instead classed it as

'just another homicide'. These examples highlight how newspaper articles can trivialise the violence they are reporting on, as was done here. This is another method of linguistic avoidance, 'a distortion of language and the distortion of reality that results from it' (Romito, 2008: 45).

After the verdict was returned, the press began to refer to Evans' immorality. In cases where the defendant is found not guilty, there are, of course, limitations to what publications can print. Legally, they could no longer refer to him as a rapist, but in a lot of articles, it seemed that the individual author or publication wanted to make their views on his behaviour clear, and this was a way of doing so without being at risk of being sued (as Evans' had threatened to do after being criticised on daytime TV programme *Loose Women*). Referring to the immorality of his actions, however, was still within their remit. *Sun*, for example, featured a headline of 'Ched Evans cleared of rape but is GUILTY of being a slimeball who treats women like dirt'. In the print version of this headline, which was on the front page, this was worded slightly differently (as 'He's cleared of rape but as a slimeball who treats women like dirt, Evans is...GUILTY') and formatted so that 'guilty' was in much larger print than the rest of the headline. Other articles called Evans a 'sordid opportunist', 'amoral' and 'loathsome'. This was seen as publications doing the 'best they could' – unable to call Evans a rapist, they resorted to calling out the nature of his behaviour (which Evans himself had admitted was 'not the best'), whilst stressing that, legally at least, he had done nothing wrong.

Whilst accurate language was used for the most part when talking about Evans, the same cannot be said when the case of another footballer was mentioned. Adam Johnson, then a footballer for Sunderland United, was found guilty of sexual activity with a fifteen-year-old girl in February 2016, and sentenced to six years in prison. His case received attention leading up to and during the trial, and continues to receive attention, due to his appeals. In April 2017, a video was published showing Johnson talking in prison saying he would have raped the girl if he had known he would get six years in prison. Johnson's ex-partner and his family have been vocal in their support for him, and his ex-partner tweeted her support to Evans and his fiancée after the verdict was returned, writing 'About time!!! NOT GUILTY team ched..'. This, along with both men being footballers, led to Johnson being mentioned in ten of the articles

in this sample. The teenage girl in Johnson's case was repeatedly referred to as a 'besotted fan' in *Sun*, and the case was called a 'child sex trial'. The former blames the girl in the case, using the idea that teenage girls 'tempt' older men into having sex with them (Soothill and Walby, 1991: 81), whilst the latter again does not name the act accurately – there is no such thing as child sex; it is rape. Like the woman in Evans' case, the girl abused by Johnson received much abuse on social media.

### 5.3.10 - Do Not Blame The Survivor

Take care not to imply that a survivor of gender-based violence might be somehow, even partially, to blame for the violence she has experienced, nor assume or imply that any of her behaviour might have triggered the abuse or that 'she asked for it' (NUJ, 2013: 2)

Over half of the articles in this sample blamed the woman at the centre of the case (105 versus 99 that did not blame her). This was done in two main ways: highlighting how she provoked Evans, or, less commonly, criticising her response to the attack.

With regards to reporting on how the woman had apparently provoked Evans, articles frequently repeated Evans' claim that the woman had looked like she had been 'enjoying herself' during the incident, as well as mentioning that she was drunk, and, to a lesser extent, had used drugs in the weeks before:

Gavin Burrough, the night receptionist at the hotel, told the court the woman was 'extremely drunk' (*BBC*, 6/10/2016)

Toxicology tests showed there were traces of cannabis and cocaine in the woman's body and she accepted she had used both drugs a 'few weeks before' but had 'not done them recently' (*Daily Telegraph*, 6/10/2016)

Her state of intoxication was also reported on when the tone of the article could be read as being more sympathetic to the woman, highlighting her as unable to consent:

A drunken teenager was so 'out of it', she could not consent to having sex with football star Ched Evans - let alone remember it, jurors have heard (*Daily Mail*, 4/10/2016)

The footballer Ched Evans raped a 'heavily intoxicated' waitress in a budget hotel room after a friend called him to say 'I've got a girl', a jury has been told. (*Guardian*, 4/10/2016)

However, this inclusion about the woman's drinking still forms a judgement of her behaviour.

Another extremely significant way that this was achieved was through the widespread reporting of the woman's sexual history, which was discussed in the 'do not sexualise women and girls' section. As I argued above, this coverage undermined the woman in the case, especially when focusing on the similarities in the language she allegedly used with the different men. It suggests to readers that if she had used this language, and had asked for rough sex in consensual sex previously, then by doing the same according to Evans, she had consented.

The woman's response to the attack was also covered. This resulted in her being both a 'good' and a 'bad' victim, at different points throughout the trial, referring to Estrich's (1987) perfect rape victim. Her 'correct' response to the alleged rape was highlighted through a friend of the woman's, who gave evidence saying she had shown up at her house the day after, 'crying hysterically' and with no memory of how she got to the hotel. Similarly, a receptionist at the hotel stated the woman was crying and repeating she could not remember how she got to the hotel or what happened whilst there. These details, heard from evidence in the first few days of the trial, were reported extensively by many of the publications in the sample, often directly quoting the woman's statement, and were often sympathetic in tone – before the tone began to shift to favour Evans after hearing from the two new witnesses.

When she was presented as a ‘bad victim’, her consumption of alcohol and sexual history was reported upon. One of the witnesses who spoke about the woman’s sexual history had had sex with her after the attack, and this, alongside the rest of the reporting of the woman’s sexual history, portrayed her as a ‘bad’ victim. The man claimed that the woman had approached him in a nightclub two weeks after the incident ‘promising to show him a ‘good time’’ (*Daily Mail*, 11/10/2016), and that, whilst he knew of Evans’ website offering a £50,000 reward for information, he went to the police as he believed the woman was lying. Articles mentioned this, including in headlines – for example, ‘I BELIEVE SHE’S LYING’ (*Sun*, 11/10/2016) – and in the body of their article. *Daily Telegraph* quoted Lady Justice Hallett, a member of the Court of Appeals that granted Evans’ retrial, saying the witness thought the woman having sex with him ‘so soon after the rape...[was] inconsistent with her being raped and he thought...that she was motivated by greed’ (15/10/2016). He stated they had been together multiple times after ‘drunken nights out’ (*Daily Mail*, 11/10/2016), again highlighting the woman’s consumption of alcohol.

Some articles, especially after the verdict, wrote about how the woman had not initially gone to the police to report rape, and often this was again used to undermine the woman. After the verdict, interviews with both Evans and his fiancée Natasha Massey were published by the Sunday edition of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* respectively, with extracts published widely elsewhere. Both Evans and Massey mentioned in these interviews that the woman had not reported rape, and had no memory of what had happened to her. Massey went on to say:

Then people started naming her so she had to change her identity. She had to move away and with all this going on she’s probably thinking, but I’ve never said I’ve been raped. She maybe went along with it and then there was no going back. She never turned up at the first trial. The police had to fetch her and bring her to court. I think she knew it wasn’t right. (*Daily Telegraph*, 21/10/2016)

Evans, similarly, stated

I think it was a situation that got taken out of our hands from an early stage. She never said anybody raped her. She said she had a blackout but that didn't mean, like it was said in court, that she didn't consent (*Daily Mail*, 15/10/2016)

In an article separate to Massey's interview, in an article titled 'Why the fallout from the Ched Evans verdict puts all our sons at risk' a journalist for the *Daily Telegraph* wrote:

Call me old-fashioned, but I will never believe that a woman who has to be told by police that she may have been raped is the victim of a rapist. That is to shamefully diminish the most hideous of crimes. (*Daily Telegraph*, 18/10/2016)

The author referred to the 'online feminist lynch mob' who expressed upset with the verdict. This apparent group was also referred to by *Daily Mail* columnist Katie Hopkins – 'Whatever the feminist online lynch mob say, Ched Evans is innocent' (17/10/2016) – who also pointed out that the woman did not initially go to the police to report rape:

Because she has never accused Ched Evans of rape.

She only ever went to the police station to report a missing handbag.

If the biggest thing on your mind after a night like that is the whereabouts of your plastic handbag you probably have a very different understanding about the relationship between actions and consequences. (*Daily Mail*, 17/10/2016)

These attitudes appeared despite research having long shown that many women who are raped never report to the police, many women never disclose at all and some wait years before disclosing

However, there were some challenges to these attitudes from other articles, although these were quite rare. For example, another *Daily Mail* article, written by feminist campaigner Julie Bindel, wrote that:

A rape victim is judged for what clothes she wears, how much she drank, her behaviour with the defendant, and how quickly she reported the allegation to the police.

When she is in the witness box, her lifestyle, medical history, and intimate details of her sex life can be laid out for all the world to hear.

Such questions are not asked if you are mugged. (*Daily Mail*, 15/10/2016)

Another article drew on the writer's own experience of rape, challenging the judgement around the woman in the case for having sex after the alleged rape:

I also know, that like X, afterwards, I had lots of sex, quite violent sex, because I wanted to prove that I could be in control. I'm assuming that if my case had gone to court, perhaps all those men would've been called up as witnesses to say because I liked sex with them, there must be doubt as to whether I liked sex with him. (*Huffington Post*, 18/10/2016)

Similarly, two articles in the *Guardian* challenged the idea that rape victims must report the crime to the police immediately (20/10/2016) and discussed why some might never report (24/10/2016).

Blame when it comes to rape is well researched, especially in the terms of rape myths (Burt, 1980). It has been argued that self-blame, a common reaction to rape, is reinforced by rape myths (Stanko, 1985). Westmarland and Alderson (2013) found that 67% of women partly blamed themselves for being raped, and a number of surveys have found high level of blame in the general population. For example, a 2005 poll found that 26% believed a woman would be partially or totally responsible if she was wearing revealing clothing, whilst 30% felt the same if she had been drunk (Amnesty International/ICM, 2005). A further 8% felt she would be totally responsible if she had many sexual partners (Amnesty International/ICM, 2005). Ullman and Townsend (2007: 435) found that, of the women in their sample, 72% had experienced 'negative or revictimizing reactions, such as being blamed or disbelieved' when they disclosed, either to people or services. Blame is common and the media has the potential to remove one source of it from women's lives.

### 5.3.11 - Include Educational Materials

Include more informative and educational materials (e.g. challenging rape myths and misconceptions about the 'types' of victim) (NUJ, 2013: 1).

Only sixteen articles in the sample included some form of education materials, with all instances of this occurring after the verdict. This included quotes from experts, such as academics or those involved with women's charities, although not always feminist specialists in sexual violence. For example, criminologists not working in the field of sexual violence, media or criminal barristers and law bloggers were quoted from. This was often in the context of explaining a law, for example why the woman in the case had anonymity, or why her sexual history was allowed to be heard, or as part of an opinion piece. For example, *Sun* published an article titled 'Know the law: Why can't we know the victim's name in the Ched Evan's rape trial? The law on UK anonymity rights', which explained that the Sexual Offences Act 2003 granted victims of sexual offences lifelong anonymity, whilst also discussing the abuse and repeated naming of the woman online.

After the trial, there was a renewed demand by some for anonymity for suspects as well as victims. All of the opinion pieces in this sample were against anonymity for suspects, and many challenged the reasoning behind anonymity for suspects, saying it assumed women lie about rape. For example:

Entwined with such demands is the public perception that false rape allegations are common. While there are some allegations which prove false, there are misconceptions about the extent of them. There are widespread stereotypes: of 'promiscuous' women who regret sexual activity and 'cry rape', or vindictive women who set out to ruin men's lives with false accusations, either for money or revenge. Whether intentionally or not, any conversation about anonymity in the judicial process raises the spectre of these figures. (*Guardian*, 18/10/2016)

Conviction rates in rape cases are low and falling, but what makes a difference is when more than one woman gives evidence. Often other women only come forward when

a man is arrested and charged - and they realise it has happened to someone else. Granting anonymity to defendants would actively obstruct the process of getting justice for victims. (*Daily Telegraph*, 15/10/2016)

Professor Jennifer Temkin of the City Law School at City University, London, told BuzzFeed News that anonymity for suspects in rape cases would be a retrograde step and bad news for victims.

‘It would suggest that rape allegations are more likely to be false than other allegations and hence those accused should be given extra protection,’ she said.

‘There is no justification for such reasoning and to base a change in the law on such reasoning would undermine the position of victims who would be treated with even more suspicion than they are already. We have a system of open justice in this country. Victims have anonymity because otherwise few would come forward to report the crime.’ (*Buzzfeed*, 17/10/2016)

These then are challenging myths about rape, meeting the aim of this guideline. However, this was done in a minority of articles in the sample, meaning that the vast majority did not challenge myths or include educational materials.

Soothill and Walby (1991: 149) have highlighted the lack of coverage of academic work relating to sexual violence, even arguing that feminist work was dismissed and ridiculed by the press. Meyers (1997: 103) has argued that journalists have a responsibility for ‘halting the perpetuation of myths’, and states one way of being able to do this is educating not only the public, but also themselves about violence against women in order to not spread common myths about rape and rape victims (1997: 112). It is clear, then, that there is much more scope for journalists to use educational materials in their reporting on sexual violence.

### 5.3.12 - Include Up-To-Date Statistics

Use up-to-date statistics and do your research (NUJ, 2013: 2)

Only ten articles included up-to-date statistics meaning that, like the inclusion of educational materials, this occurred in a very small minority of the articles in the sample. These came from the opinion type pieces which were published in the weeks following the verdict, such as those discussing the 'exceptional' nature of using a woman's sexual history, and none were included in the day to day coverage of Evans' retrial. Almost all instances of statistics being used were in the more left leaning publications, with nine of the ten appearing in *Buzzfeed*, *Guardian* and *Huffington Post*, and just one appearing in the *Sun*. The statistics used often included the national numbers of recorded rapes:

Data released on Saturday by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary on behalf of its rape monitoring group found that in 2015-16, police recorded 23,851 reports of adults being raped – nearly all of them women – compared with 10,160 in 2011-12. (*Guardian*, 15/10/2016)

Meanwhile, roughly 11 adults are raped every HOUR in England and Wales and 31 per cent of young women aged 18 to 24 have reported experiencing sexual abuse in childhood. (*Sun*, 19/10/2016)

or looked at the criminal justice system's dealings with rape cases:

Only 15-20% of the 97,000 rape or sexual assault incidents committed every year are ever reported to the authorities, and on average, only 5.7% of these reports result in a criminal conviction. (*Huffington Post*, 17/10/2016)

Like the use of educational materials discussed previously, the use of statistics offers an opportunity to educate readers about the reality of rape, and it is worrying that relevant data that offers an important context was used so little in the coverage of this case.

### 5.3.13 - Use Appropriate Language for Survivor

In the case of attack that has not resulted in murder, do not use the word 'victim' unless the woman self-identifies as one. If she has survived the attack, she is a 'survivor' (NUJ, 2013: 1)

Therefore, this research looked at how survivors were referred to by the articles in the sample, with 81 articles using inappropriate language to do this. 'Victim' was coded as inappropriate when it referred directly to a specific woman. When it was used in the broader sense, as it was in some opinion pieces after the trial ended, it was not considered inappropriate. As with the language used to refer to Evans, there are of course restrictions on how the woman can be referred to. The use of the term 'victim' was anticipated. What was unexpected, however, was the woman in the case being referred to as 'accuser'. This was particularly common after the verdict of not guilty was returned. 'Accuser', unlike complainant or victim, is not a legal term, and carries with it strongly negative connotations. Throughout the 204 articles included in the sample, 'accuser' was used 121 times across 52 (25%) of articles, with 49 of these being after the verdict. It appeared in headlines:

Ched Evans' Accuser Named on Social Media (*Daily Mail*, 14/10/2016)

Social media naming of Ched Evans's accuser raises legal questions (*Guardian*, 14/10/2016)

'Solidarity' shown to Ched Evans accuser (*BBC*, 24/10/2016)

as well as in subheadings and the main text of articles:

Evans was arrested after having 'threesome' sex with his accuser and fellow player, Clayton McDonald (*Daily Mail*, 14/10/2016)

The new verdict triggered death threats against Evans' accuser on social media (*Huffington Post*, 14/10/2016)

FOOTBALLER Ched Evans has apologised to his teen accuser after he wept as he was sensationally cleared of rape this afternoon (*Sun*, 14/10/2016)

The accuser got a taxi to the hotel with his friend and fellow footballer Clayton McDonald, where Mr Evans had booked a room (*BBC*, 17/10/2016)

This is something not explored by previous research (although it was evidenced but not explored by Franiuk et al. [2008b]), and it is an important finding. Writing in 2015, Jackson Katz implored the media to stop calling Bill Cosby's victims his 'accusers', calling it 'an act of subtle but profound victim-blaming' that can potentially silence victims by making women's actions the object of scrutiny instead of men's (Katz, 2015). With so many of the instances being after Evans was found not guilty, it could demonstrate an uncertainty on the part of newspapers on how to refer to victims in trials after the perpetrator has been found not guilty. However, it could also be more sinister than this, being an intentionally negative way to cast doubt and blame upon the woman in the case. Whilst journalists may not have been able to use the term 'victim' following the verdict, other language is available. For example, 'complainant', though it also carries strong negative connotations, is at least a legal term. It is recommended, however, that 'woman' be used following the verdict, as it is more neutral a descriptive, without the negative connotations that other terms hold.

Soothill and Walby (1991) discuss the language used to refer to the survivors in the articles they looked at, and this found it was sometimes sexualised. This did not appear to be an issue in this sample, and this could be because of the focus on one specific high-profile case involving a celebrity, rather than looking at coverage of more cases over a long period of time. Soothill and Walby (1991: 82) cite examples of a teenage girl being called a 'Lolita', which also serves the purpose of making the rapist sound powerless.

#### 5.3.14 - Report Stranger Rapes as Rarer

In general, when presenting stories on rape keep in mind that stranger rapes are rarer than those involving people known to the survivor (NUJ, 2013: 2)

Again, the number of articles following this guidance was extremely low at only two, meaning 202 articles did not follow this advice. Of the two that did, one was an opinion piece written

by Labour MP Jess Phillips, who along with other female Labour MPs, wrote to the Attorney General for an end in the use of a complainant's sexual history in rape trials. She wrote that

Most people are raped or sexually abused by someone they know. It is very possible, likely even, that a perpetrator will know someone else a victim has had sex with before; they could be friends. Imagine for a second that you were raped by someone in your friendship group, who after you had told the police, went around your mates finding out what you had been up to and exactly what you said during sex, or how you moved. If I thought for a second that this might happen, I know it would make it harder for me to come forward. (*Guardian*, 24/10/2016)

The other article reported on proposals made to a bill to allow those raped by strangers to not have their name shared with the perpetrator but acknowledged that 'the proportion of rapes committed by strangers is small – one in 10 according to Rape Crisis – campaigners say measures should cover all sexual assault cases to protect victims'.

Other articles did not report that rapes committed by someone unknown to the victim are rarer. Most did not make any reference to this, but some included quotes or wrote in a way that actively went against the NUJ guidance. For example, in an interview with Evans' fiancée Natasha Massey, she was quoted defending the use of the complainant's sexual history by saying

'If it's a rape where some man's just jumped on a woman in the street you're not going to mention her sexual history because it's got nothing to do with it. But in a case like Ched's it did matter because it was to do with consent.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 21/10/2016)

Here, whether Massey is aware of it or not, she is drawing upon the 'real rape' stereotype (Estrich, 1987), describing the 'perfect' rape victim who can be seen as completely innocent, and implying that the woman in this case cannot be seen this way.

Westmarland (2015: 131) argues that rape by strangers is 'nearly always taken more seriously at a criminal justice, media and societal level' and previous research has repeatedly shown how the media presents rapes as committed by a stranger to the victim, even though we know that most victims are raped by someone known to them. Greer (2003: 185), for example, found that coverage in Northern Ireland created the image of the 'predatory stranger'. He writes that the 'association of advice on personal safety...sends a clear message that it is strangers who pose the greatest threat' (2003: 70). Similarly, Soothill and Walby (1991: 148) have argued that the media utilises a 'narrow definition of sex crime', part of this being that a woman is assaulted by a total stranger. As well as this, they argue the press likes to 'seek the sensational', with a major focus of this being the 'hunt' for the perpetrator (1991: 146) – this cannot take place if the perpetrator and victim are known to each other. Kitzinger (2004: 140) has suggested that media stories of 'stranger danger' are 'complemented, reinforced and reiterated through everyday conversation' about cases of child sexual abuse, and this is in marked contrast to sexual abuse committed within communities, such as the family.

It is important to note that Evans and the woman in the case did not know each other before the alleged rape; at best, they were acquaintances. During the trial, it was reported that they had met previously, though neither recalled this, and that Evans did not speak to the woman before having sex with her. The media spent time reassuring readers that the use of sexual history in rape trials is rare – although we know it is not: data suggests 43% of rape trials hear the complainant's sexual history (Zydervelt et al., 2016) – but not that stranger rapes are rarer than rapes committed by someone known to the victim. It is not necessarily the issue that the case should or should not have been reported as a case of rape by a stranger, but that articles did not put the case into a wider context where rape is more likely to be perpetrated by someone known to the victim. As with the guidance around the use of statistics and educational materials earlier, publications have an opportunity to educate readers, and challenge conceptions of rape. This includes who is more likely to commit rape.

### 5.3.15 - Do Not Distract from Perpetrator

This category, and the nodes associated with it, were not part of the NUJ guidance, but the need for it became apparent during the coding process, as articles would often include information about, or refer to Evans through, his career, (for example, *Footballer Ched Evans not guilty of raping a 19-year-old*). A total of 45 articles out of the 204 did distract, either through Evans' career, or his fiancée, from Evans and the crime itself. After the verdict, there was a significant amount of discussion on Evans' career prospects, and whether he would be signed by a bigger team, and if he would play for Wales again. This included speculation about claiming for a loss of earnings, as well as inviting comments from management at Chesterfield and the Welsh team.

This is not the first time an athlete's skill or career has received coverage as if it is relevant to the case. Franiuk et al. (2008: 294) found in their research of the coverage of US basketball player Kobe Bryant's rape trial that Bryant's skill as an athlete was referred to in almost a quarter of articles. More recently, the case of Stanford University student Brock Turner garnered a lot of attention. Turner was found guilty of raping an unconscious woman, but was given a six-month sentence, and served only half of this, with the judge arguing the media attention meant Turner had already suffered (Levin, 2016). Similarly, Braber (2014: 96) found examples of the *Guardian* referring to a footballer who had assaulted his girlfriend in terms of his football skills: 'a skilful, two-footed player'. As Waterhouse-Watson (2016a: 75) has argued, this is an example of the 'reifying' the perpetrator's sports career in a manner that 'supersedes the interests of the woman allegedly harmed', and she suggests that this valuing of male footballers' interests over female rape complainants' mirrors wider gender inequality.

Articles also referred to Evans' fiancée Natasha Massey, whose father funded Evans' campaign and appeal. After the verdict, *Daily Telegraph* published an interview with Massey, and excerpts were included in other publications. The interview was, overall, tame in its questioning of Massey, and focused on her suffering because of the trial. There was a significant amount of crossover here creating sympathy for Evans, such as through discussing the effects the trial had had on Evans and Massey's relationship, and on their baby son. The

*Daily Mail* ran a headline quoting Massey from the *Daily Telegraph* interview saying ‘I was physically sick when I heard what Ched Evans had done, says his fiancée – but rape? He hasn’t got it in him’ (22/10/2016).

Another key part of this coverage was that Massey’s father had offered £50,000 to anyone who could provide evidence that Evans was innocent. After the retrial, the press revealed that Massey had offered this reward to a witness in the original trial, messaging the hotel night receptionist. The prosecution argued it was ‘akin to a bribe’, whilst the defence stated Massey was simply desperate to help Evans, who was unaware of the messages being sent, as he was in prison at the time. The judge ruled that the jury should not hear about these messages, so the press were unable to report until after the verdict was returned. Articles quoted the messages, with the *Daily Mail* including part in their headline: ‘I’m literally begging... if you know anything please help me’: How Ched Evans’ fiancée offered £50,000 reward on Facebook that was ‘akin to a bribe’ (14/10/2016). In her *Daily Telegraph* interview, Massey was asked about this:

She sighs. ‘I was desperate. Ched had spent 13 months in prison so I was clutching at straws. Imagine someone you love being sentenced for rape and you know he isn’t guilty. So I remember being on Facebook and this Gavin Burroughs popped up, the night porter. At the trial, he said he heard sex going on in the room. Sounds of pleasure and not just a man’s voice. It was a male and a female. So all I did – there was no bribery – I sent him a message on Facebook saying have you got any information?’

So you’re sure you weren’t trying to bribe him?

‘I wasn’t asking him to lie. I said there’s a £50,000 reward, but I didn’t say lie and you’ll get this money. I said do you have any information because I genuinely thought that there was more to come out.’

Some articles, such as the above, were sympathetic, but others were not, with a number of articles referring to Massey’s offer as a bribe, including the *Sun* who ran the headline: ‘IT IS AKIN TO A BRIBE’ Ched Evans’ fiancée Natasha Massey offered key witness £50,000 ‘bribe’ for evidence to clear his name’ (14/10/2016). The *Daily Telegraph* also reported on the ‘bribe’:

‘Ched Evans’s girlfriend offered a £50,000 ‘bribe’ to a key witness in his rape trial to help find new evidence to clear him, it can now be reported’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 15/10/2016), highlighting that even within publications, opinions are not consistent.

Boyle (2018: 1566) has written how struck she was that, in the reporting around Jimmy Savile, he was constructed around women – in his case, a lack of romantic relationships and a closeness to his mother. Similarly, Soothill and Walby (1991: 62) highlight in their research on coverage of serial rapist Malcom Fairley, known in the media as ‘The Fox’, his wife and ex-wife were a focus of newspapers. They quote headlines such as ‘FOX WIFE IN MENTAL HOSPITAL’, and interviews were published with his ex-wife, including her name, and the names of her husband and child (1991: 63). As well as this, Fairley’s elderly mother was also searched for by the press, with the *Star* and *Daily Mail* publishing her full name and address, alongside headlines such as ‘THE SAD MOTHER HE BETRAYED’ (Soothill and Walby, 1991: 63). Whilst Savile, Fairley and Evans and their relationships with women were reported quite differently, it highlights that the women around perpetrators will be sought out and examined by the press.

This distraction from the perpetrator highlights another problem. Evans can be reported on for what he is known for outside of the case, yet the victim cannot be, due to her legal right to anonymity. I am by no means arguing that this right should be abolished, but it showcases yet another disparity between the victim and the defendant in rape cases. The coverage afforded to Evans’ career and family made him more personable, whilst all the public knew about the victim was what had been presented as evidence in the case, such as her sexual history, which is less likely to evoke sympathy, and belief. Meanwhile, the press can focus on emotive topics such as Evans’ family and career. This inevitably puts the victim at a disadvantage in high-profile cases where the defendant is a public figure. This issue is also emphasised by Waterhouse-Watson (2013: 35), who argues that football fans often feel they ‘know’ footballers, as they are ‘familiar with their background, personality and family’, so therefore ‘generally respond to news about them as they would for someone they actually knew’.

## 5.4 - Summary & Recommendations

Overall, this research has demonstrated that that UK news coverage of Evans' retrial was inaccurate and reproduced damaging ideas about rape. It has highlighted that victim-blaming is no longer solely the blatant and obvious rape myths highlighted by previous research, but has, at least in this case, adapted to become more subtle and more insidious, and therefore harder to challenge.

It is therefore recommended that the NUJ guidelines are followed by journalists, potentially by publications agreeing to a code of conduct when reporting on violence against women. It recommended that, whilst comprehensive, the NUJ guidelines could also be improved upon, such as guidance about how to refer to complainants when a defendant is found not guilty – guidance that might suggest, for example, that using 'accuser' is highly inappropriate. This research has highlighted the lack of appropriate language used to refer to the woman in this case, with 25% of the articles in the sample referring to her as 'accuser'. This needs to be recognised in guidelines for reporting and prevented from continuing.

After the return of the not guilty verdict, there was a sense amongst many articles that Evans' behaviour was misguided at best, and reprehensible at worst. Therefore, it is my belief that, despite being found not guilty, much of the coverage was not in Evans' favour. However, I do not mean to argue that coverage was instead in favour of the woman – she undoubtedly received some sympathy, especially in opinion pieces when the trial had ended, but coverage before this was not compassionate towards her.

This demonstrates that whilst victim-blaming is alive and well in the British media, it is no longer looks like the coverage Soothill and Walby wrote about in 1991. It has become more subtle, more insidious, and harder to challenge. Whilst it draws upon the rape myths feminists have long criticised, it does this less obviously than we might expect. The drawing upon of

gender stereotypes points to the sexism experienced in the media for all women, and the coverage of online abuse directed at women highlights another media platform in which women are abused. News coverage may report on 'the facts' of a rape trial, but there is a lot to be said for *how* these 'facts' are reported upon. In this case, for example, the woman's sexual history formed a key part of the trial. Publications could have said this without publishing the finer details in their stories and headlines. Similarly, discussing the effects of the case on Evans' family and career paints Evans as a fully developed human being, making him easier to be sympathetic towards, whilst the woman was defined by only what we knew of her through the trial – namely, her sexual history and behaviour on nights out, factors which are unlikely to evoke the same sympathy from the public as comments about the effect of the trial on Evans' baby and fiancée. Journalists need to consider the effects their words can have, not only on the public, but on victim-survivors of sexual violence.

## Chapter 6 – Interviews with Supporters

### 6.1 - Introduction

This chapter explores the findings from interviews conducted with eight women who support victim-survivors of sexual violence. Participants were based within local Rape Crisis centres, either as staff or volunteers. The results will be discussed by each main theme used during the analysis (presented in Table 1), although, to avoid repetition, some will be discussed together where there was overlap. The chapter will therefore begin by discussing how the supporters defined victim-blaming, before looking at how they felt about specialist support for women who have experienced sexual violence. It will then discuss how the supporters felt about social media and victim-blaming, before moving onto talk about their experiences of challenging victim-blaming, both personally and within their role. Different forms of media, such as TV shows, will be discussed, and this will be followed by looking at the various consequences supporters felt the media could have for victim-survivors. Presentations of victim-survivors and perpetrators in the media will be discussed, before looking at the coverage of the case of Ched Evans. This will be followed by how the supporters felt change could be created in the media. Finally, the chapter will consider the one change supporters would make to coverage of sexual violence. Overall, the chapter seeks to argue that the media can have a range of consequences for victim-survivors, although it is important to note that not all of these are negative, and that good media coverage of sexual violence, across a range of media formats, is important.

### 6.2 - Definitions of Victim-Blaming

The opening questions of the interviews with supporters revolved around asking what they understood victim-blaming to be. Their responses were broken down into four sub themes: examples of victim-blaming; blame on victim; blame from perpetrator; and societal and structural. When asked what victim-blaming meant to them, some participants drew upon different rape myths as examples:

Victim-blaming is, did you see what she was wearing? You know, she shouldn't have been wearing that...she was really drunk or she was off her head on drugs. (Jane)

The most common responses when offering a definition of victim-blaming was to discuss putting some or all the responsibility for the attack upon the victim:

To me, it means that the responsibility of the crime, if not totally, partially gets put onto the victim, that it was somehow the victim's fault that the crime was committed against them, so had the victim not done something differently or if something about the victim's behaviour or dress or whatever is somehow partly responsible for what happened to her. (Jennifer)

This putting of blame upon the victim was usually accompanied by this blame being *taken away* from the perpetrator of the violence:

The idea of holding, particularly in the context of rape and sexual violence, women responsible and accountable for things that have happened to them, so um blaming their presentation, their behaviour, essentially locating the cause, the aetiology of violence in the victim's behaviour rather than in men's behaviour, or perpetrator's behaviour. (Leslie)

A portion or all of the blame and responsibility for that act is placed on the person who suffered rather than the person who's committed the act. (Tanya)

These explanations draw upon similar identifying themes when discussing victim-blaming – that the victim becomes the person to be held (whether this is fully or partially) responsible for the sexual violence, because of some aspect of their behaviour (be it alcohol or drug consumption, clothing choices or another reason), whilst the perpetrator of that violence is seemingly seen as being absolved of some or all of the responsibility.

However, some participants took the above explanations further, and moved them beyond single victims and perpetrators by suggesting that victim-blaming is not just individual, but societal:

[Victim-blaming is] activities and attitudes and...societal structures that aim to deflect the blame of sexual violence away from the perpetrator and society in general towards the victim and towards a[n] individual victim or towards all women and girls. (Danielle)

Danielle expanded upon this, saying it is easy to identify some things as being victim-blaming (such as some of the myths mentioned above around alcohol), but others as being harder to identify, and she used the example of language around criminal injuries compensation. This is particularly relevant given the results of the media analysis conducted in this research, where it was found that victim-blaming in news coverage of high profile cases of sexual violence is more subtle than previous research has found. This was something also identified by Samantha when she talked about how the 'classic' forms of victim-blaming are like a checklist now, but people still cannot identify subtler, and therefore less obvious, forms of victim-blaming.

As well as the above, one participant discussed how rape myths and victim-blaming may be used to understand and offer a form of protection from sexual violence for some people – believing that, as they would never engage in the behaviour that rape myths blame, then they are safe from sexual violence:

I think it's a way sometimes using it to understand why sexual violence might take place, for instance if somebody has a limited understanding about sexual violence and they hear 'well why was she walking around at night on her own?' instead of thinking that she has the right to do that...That whole sense of victim-blaming tends to make people feel better about it because they think they wouldn't do some of those behaviours, therefore it would never happen to them. So for instance somebody might say 'well I wouldn't wear a short skirt on a night out so therefore it won't happen to me, it'll happen to her because look at what she's wearing'. (Sheryl)

The above discussion highlights that there are different levels of understanding of victim-blaming, starting with understandings of what victim-blaming may be all the way through to looking at societal structures and explanations for victim-blaming.

## **6.3 - Specialist Support Services**

Participants also discussed their thoughts and experiences around working or volunteering in a specialist, women-only sexual violence service. As mentioned earlier, all eight of the participants were either employed at or volunteered for a Rape Crisis centre, with five employed members of staff and three volunteers. There were a variety of roles, including, but not limited to, CEO, (lead) counsellor, helpline supporter, group worker, practical and emotional support worker, as well as volunteer trainer. Of the five members of staff, three had been volunteers with either their current centre or another Rape Crisis centre before obtaining employment with them, and one of the volunteers had previously engaged in some short-term paid work for their centre.

### **6.3.1 - Challenging Victim-Blaming**

When it came to how their organisation as a whole challenged victim-blaming, participants often identified that this was done at different levels, such as through the support offered to victim-survivors, training or campaigning work. For example, Danielle stated that challenging victim-blaming is 'part of every single bit of work that we do' and discussed the 'two strands' of work of Rape Crisis centres – working with women and girls and creating social change. Firstly, the organisational ways of challenging victim-blaming will be discussed, before looking at the more individual ways of challenging victim-blaming when working directly with victim-survivors. At an organisational level, participants referred to awareness raising work, such as campaigns or going into schools and universities. One of the centres whose staff and volunteers took part in the research had a specific group of activist volunteers, and Lisa spoke about the work she had done within this group, with one of their key aims being ending stigma around sexual violence. Similarly, being present at community events and visible to the public was mentioned by some of the participants, whilst being active on social media and maintaining a presence online was key (although the disadvantages of social media will be discussed later). Training external groups, such as with the police or other charities, or sitting on different panels (such as with local Police and Crime Commissioners) was also seen as important.

Samantha suggested that her centre would like to be more proactive in challenging victim-

blaming in the media, although they were doing more than they ever previously had, but were restricted due to resources. She imagined they would be able to be more proactive if they had a dedicated social media or media member of staff, as currently different staff members and volunteers ran the social media and did media engagement as needed. Similarly, resources were raised by Jennifer, who stated that ‘we would ideally have...our own media department’.<sup>1</sup> This highlights a strain within small independent charities in terms of creating a change within media reporting, and not having the same resources as bigger charities, or the media they are challenging.

Participants also spoke about how they within their individual role challenged victim-blaming, and this often overlapped with the nature of support the organisation offered as a specialist sexual violence service. Leslie, for example, framed the work she does on the helpline as ‘a form of resistance’, by the act of ‘bearing witness’ to victim-survivors, whilst Samantha stated that self-blame and victim-blaming was consistent since she began doing this work in the late-nineties:

It’s just like this line that goes all the way through that that is always there to do, and it’s always there to do. It seems the default for almost every client or victim is you blame yourself first. (Samantha)

Other examples of challenging victim-blaming in supporting victim-survivors was sometimes directly challenging the self-blame participants identified victim-survivors as often carrying. Jennifer, for example, talked about how she would ‘flip it on its head’ when women blamed themselves, in order for them to see it from a different perspective. Similarly, Lisa talked of ‘breaking [victim-blaming] down but gently’ and working backwards from the blame:

You go ‘okay, well why do you think it’s important that you were out drinking when it happened?’ and she’ll go ‘well you know I was vulnerable, what did I expect?’ and we go ‘what did you expect, just out of curiosity, when you were getting ready that night?’ and ‘well you know I thought I’d go out with the girls and have a few drinks, have a good dance’ and go ‘*that*, that’s what you expected’.

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<sup>1</sup> When quoting from interviews, ... indicates that a section of the transcript was cut

This gentle challenging when working directly with victim-survivors was apparent throughout the interviews. Sheryl, for example, described her challenging as being done ‘sensitively, carefully, respectfully, in a language the person can understand’, and this was something also highlighted by Leslie. Jennifer also suggested, if a woman was accessing multiple services in the organisation, how important it was for this challenging of victim-blaming to be consistent across these services to reinforce the message, and doing this as a constant, not a one-off activity, was also seen as central to the support work by Danielle. As well as this, Tanya discussed ‘staying with them’ when talking to women on the helpline, and not negating but recognising the feelings of self-blame women had, whilst gently challenging self-blame.

For Danielle, belief was also key to the nature of support being offered by the centres, and she stated that this was both belief that the abuse had happened and that it was not their fault. This ethos of ‘we believe you’, she felt, was throughout all the centre’s work. Similarly, Tanya felt that a main policy of her centre was that ‘rape is *not* a woman’s fault and that’s our line for *all* women’.

### 6.3.2 - Engaging with the Media

When it came to media engagement, participants talked of the challenges associated with this. Lisa, talking about her experience as an activist volunteer, spoke about how hard it had been to engage with local news publications, although the initial response had been positive:

Lisa: I just got in touch with the reporter saying do you mind in the future, if you’re ever posting about sexual violence can you just include the Rape Crisis contact details?...He was like ‘yep sure great I’ll put it through to the press desk’ (pause) nothing.

Researcher: He hasn’t done it?

Lisa: Nope.

She mentioned that others had reached out to do similar with other local publications and had not received a reply to their initial request, highlighting the difficulties that can be faced for small charities when working with the media.

One of the challenges raised in engaging with the media was that centres could be asked or

expected to comment on a local case, where the victim-survivor was already engaging in the services offered by the centre, or the centre needed to be mindful that she might choose to do so in the future, and this was raised by Jennifer and Samantha:

One of the other things that is hard is that sometimes if you're talking about anything that's happened locally, that women might be accessing our services, and it would be very insensitive to kind of raise a comment on a case in some way it might prevent her from accessing our service. (Jennifer)

When we are being quite proactive with the media, particularly if it's on an individual case, we have to be very careful because quite often those women will be using [a Rape Crisis centre] and often have quite strong feelings about sometimes they don't like seeing that we're involved in that end of it...I've definitely had that with clients of my own...they'd sometimes see me on the telly or on the radio and almost not like that, so I think that's sometimes just a tension for us as an organisation (Samantha)

Jennifer said that this was something that had been an issue recently, and that the centre had agreed to not comment specifically on the case, even if approached by the media, as they felt that to do so would be 'insensitive and she would have unlikely accessed our services'. Samantha suggested that clients accessing services would prefer 'a bit of separation, so you can kind of say, that's our other arm' – with a differentiation between the support services and the campaigning done by the centre, and that, at least, the person involved in supporting that woman would not do media work around the case. She also said the option was there for Rape Crisis England & Wales to comment for media stories, particularly high-profile cases. Sheryl also felt that having certain people trained for media work allowed her to ensure she was maintaining professional boundaries in her counselling work. She also, however, suggested that it was good 'actually seeing the workers, seeing people who know what they're talking about' in the media. This was echoed by Tanya, who identified that she really liked seeing quotes from Rape Crisis England & Wales, or from the local centres or other experts in the media, but felt that this was not done often enough.

## 6.4 - Social Media

Social media was raised frequently by participants, despite there being no explicit questions on it in the interview schedule.

For Sheryl, she described social media as a 'double edged sword', where it could be a source of support, but also a source of victim-blaming. She talked about how clients had been left 'feeling really awful and isolated and alone' when they received an unsupportive response. Samantha also warned that one of her clients had felt 'a bit outed' by social media, as she followed and shared content from the organisation on Twitter:

Even that's quite exposing cause she was telling me that somebody said to her 'oh I noticed you follow two charities' and one is you know, childhood cancer or something, one is [the organisation], and kind of did it in a very questioning like, 'ooh you know I was quite surprised when I looked on your Twitter, you always retweet all these things from Rape Crisis' and she said she just kind of went 'yeah, yeah, you know those are two I support'...but she said she felt quite, a bit outed.

A main concern raised by participants here was social media as a bubble or an echo chamber, both in terms of their own personal accounts and their organisation's accounts. Jennifer, for example, stated:

I know that we do have a social media presence but I'm not sure how wide of an impact that actually has because when you're looking at people who follow us maybe on Twitter or Facebook, it's that kind of echo chamber thing where people [who] are only actually interested in and believe in what we do follow us, so we're reinforcing the message to people who, it's preaching to the choir.

Similarly, Leslie felt that 'it often feels like everybody is talking about victim-blaming' but recognised this was a 'reflection' of her own online world and summarised this by saying 'I think it's that whole thing...of if you're in the echo chamber you can't always see outside the echo chamber'. Lisa echoed this, saying that she did see media challenging victim-blaming, but that this was 'in my little...left-wing, feminist little bubble on Facebook'. Danielle also felt

that the only good coverage she remembered seeing around the Ched Evans case was the 'digital, online...feminist' response to victim-blaming in the mainstream media.

Despite this, participants also felt that social media was a site of victim-blaming. Danielle specifically discussed Ched Evans and the abuse the woman in this case received on social media, particularly on the hashtags 'freechedevans' or 'chedevans', where she was named and abused. Sheryl also used this case as an example, referring to the comments made by Evans and his friends on social media, such as saying she was 'just doing it for the money', and describing them as 'just *awful*'. She stated that they use some of these comments in external training, and that 'it doesn't get any easier to hear, so every time I hear it, I feel as bad as I did the first time'. Lisa also drew upon comments she had seen on social media, both for Ched Evans and another local case, drawing a dichotomy between the woman in Evans' case who was blamed and seen as a 'bad' victim, whilst the woman in the local case (who was raped whilst in her home after a man broke in) was supported and described as undeserving of the rape.

However, Jennifer suggested that social media was a site of resistance for victim-blaming. She felt that challenges did not come from mainstream media, but from backlash on social media, such as to specific victim-blaming comments reported in the media, and it may be this backlash that then receives further attention from the mainstream media 'as opposed to a journalist taking their own initiative to report on it'. Leslie also referred to this, by discussing the activism found on social media in response to victim-blaming in the mainstream media by retweeting and using hashtags to reach certain goals, such as a newspaper retracting a victim-blaming statement.

Danielle also discussed the organisation using social media to challenge victim-blaming, and she talked about the tone of voice they made sure to use across their publicity and social media materials, including use of the ethos of belief. Whilst she said that part of creating a change and challenging victim-blaming came from 'being a voice on social media', she also warned that 'you don't create social change just by being present on social media'.

This leads us onto the next theme within the findings, that of challenging victim-blaming.

## 6.5 - Challenging Victim-Blaming

Participants were asked about their experiences of challenging victim-blaming, including challenging friends and family, and the emotional impact of doing such challenging.

### 6.5.1 - In Personal Life

When asked if they challenged victim-blaming in their personal lives, the response from participants was overwhelmingly and strongly positive:

Always and continually (laughs) of course, what kind of person would I be if I didn't?  
(Tanya)

Yeah, definitely, unequivocally, um, I guess for me because it's just so lived, like I couldn't live with, I can't have people in my personal life really who are like that.  
(Leslie)

Well, absolutely, yeah, yeah. All the time. Ridiculously so. (Jane)

There were suggestions that this had, eventually, led to, as Danielle put it, having 'self-selected' or 'weeded out' people who held victim-blaming attitudes, but this also worked the other way, as Jennifer suggested that 'most of my family and friends have blocked me or unfriended me' on social media or now will not discuss it with her. She did, however, state that sometimes she will put more effort into changing a friend's mind if she thinks that they are open to it:

I've got people who I'm more emotionally invested in so there's so people who I'll just argue with like the MRA [men's rights activists] guys with no tact, and then I've got people who I know are...on a journey of enlightenment, and they're just saying something daft and I will put a lot more emotional labour into helping them see it for what it is, but it's like with other people I'll just be like 'Bye, Felicia!' and block them.

Lisa echoed this, reflecting that she sometimes had to reflect on *why* she was doing the challenging in certain situations, saying:

Sometimes I have to go am I doing this because I think I can change something here or am I doing that because I'm pissed off and I've had a bad day and I want to rant at somebody.

Lisa also discussed being limited in her challenging family, saying 'Sometimes I have to step off my soapbox, like Christmas day...I'll start saying something and my Dad'll say 'Not today''. Lisa noted that she, like Jennifer, would usually try to challenge family consistently because 'you can't break down an attitude with one conversation'. Sheryl also felt that her words as a professional in the field hold more weight in challenging victim-blaming, and that she 'would hope that people have faith in us because we know what we're talking about', suggesting in some ways an advanced level of responsibility that she as a practitioner holds with regards to challenging victim-blaming. Similarly, Tanya felt that, in her personal and private life, she was more able to challenge victim-blaming as 'I don't have to abide by anybody's policies', whereas this was not possible in other areas of her life, such as work.

However, there was more to this discussion than just challenging family or friends. For example, Danielle said 'it's not just there, it's throughout society and it's about challenging each other as well'. She also recognised that there were times when she was sure she had needed to be challenged by other women and girls on her attitudes. This sentiment of wanting to be challenged when needed was also recognised by Leslie: 'I actually want to grow and if people don't challenge me, there are ways in which I might be victim-blaming without even recognising it'. This, then, highlights a level of reflexivity required in order to recognise and challenge internalised victim-blaming attitudes.

### 6.5.2 - Feelings When Challenging

This challenging, particularly of family and friends, was sometimes emotionally difficult for the supporters interviewed, and Samantha summarised this need to challenge victim-blaming, but the difficulty she sometimes felt in doing so by saying 'sometimes you do just want a day off, don't you?', whilst Sheryl said that 'generally, it is hard, it really is hard, cause none of use wants to upset anyone'. Jennifer described it as 'disheartening cause I feel like the wider world is getting worse', and that at times 'you feel like you're trying to stop an

ocean...it's exhausting'. Tanya mentioned concerns about being seen as a 'feminist killjoy...waffling on again about rapists', and how it can be difficult challenging when you were previously having a nice time with friends. The emotional labour, then, of engaging in challenging victim-blaming was apparent in the interviews, and led to the participants sometimes choosing not to challenge. Jane for example, sometimes did not challenge when she was with her family, saying 'I think you know that sometimes I've got to give them a break' – a sentiment echoed by Samantha, who recalled her son once asking 'is there not one pen in this house that doesn't say the word rape on it?'

From the above, then, we can see that challenging victim-blaming is not always easy, and can have a real emotional labour on the women who support survivors of sexual violence. Despite the emotional labour involved, all of the practitioners involved in this study felt it was important to be challenging victim-blaming wherever they could, from within their professional role to their personal lives as well, and were significantly aware of the potentially negative impact that this might have on their relationships with other people.

## **6.6 - Different Types of Media**

During the interviews, different types of media were discussed, as participants discussed their own and their clients' experiences.

### **6.6.1 - Non-Fictional Coverage**

When it came to news media, there was a sense that some publications were better than other. Whether this was in terms of responding to complaints, as Jennifer felt that publications such as the *Guardian* or *Independent* were more likely to retract or change a victim-blaming statement, and also felt they were less likely to report sexual violence in a sensationalist manner. Tanya and Lisa also felt that if there had been positive coverage around the Ched Evans case, then it was more likely to have been in the *Guardian* than other publications. Lisa also felt that, 'if I'm being optimistic', that journalists reporting sexual violence were ignorant of the implications of what they were saying, and just needed more training, although, if they were engaging in victim-blaming deliberately, it was still an issue of

ignorance, and we need to open a dialogue in order to create understanding. Samantha felt that how the criminal justice system was reported in the press could have an impact on women when deciding whether or not to report, saying she could imagine if someone was making this decision, seeing articles in the press discussing, for example, the conviction rate, could put women off, but also felt that women needed to be informed 'from the start'.

### 6.6.2 - Fictional Coverage

Fictionalised accounts of sexual violence were also seen as important to participants, with the BBC drama *Three Girls*, based on the abuse in Rotherham, being mentioned multiple times, as a number of helpline callers and clients had raised it with the supporters. Whilst none of the participants identified negative representations within *Three Girls*, they identified it as having an impact on victim-survivors:

There's been a number of women call the helpline specifically saying 'It was *Three Girls*' but I don't [think] that *Three Girls* necessarily did a bad job in terms of victim-blaming. (Danielle)

The TV dramatization *Three Girls* keeps coming up with more than one caller that I spoke to that they'd seen things on the TV, and one of them said to me 'you know there was no warning, nobody told me that was coming' and that had been really difficult for her, as it correlated really strongly with her experience. (Tanya)

Samantha also discussed the ITV crime drama *Broadchurch*, of which the third and final season revolved around a rape case. The show worked alongside Rape Crisis England & Wales to develop the story and supported longer opening hours for the national helpline. Samantha was therefore particularly disappointed by one particular scene in the show:

I thought that one was going quite well actually and then there was that point where the kind of ISVA manager and the ISVA approached another woman in the street and they went 'look this happened 2 years ago, we worked with you and now it's happened to someone else, you're going to have to help', and I thought 'Oh God' that that was factually so incorrect...I think that probably must have alarmed quite a number of women and it must have got 'oh god somebody could come I remember two years

ago I had an ISVA and this, are they going to come and approach me in the street and say this happened to somebody else now'. So I think people can be really affected by it and if it's not factually correct, and it's a shame cause that one actually was pretty good, other than that bit.

She went on to say:

I was at some panel...and everybody said the same thing 'why on earth did they put that bit in?' because it wouldn't have happened in that way. You know, this woman's in Tesco going and somebody touches her on the shoulder and starts almost laying it on her that you know you need to do something about this cause there's another victim now, um, and of course that's most women's- I think a lot of the women I've worked with, that's one of the reasons they do report because they don't want it, they're not usually doing it for themselves, they just don't want it to happen to anyone else.

She felt that this inaccurate depiction could deter women from 'even wanting to explore' reporting, or creating a lack of trust between them and their supporter. Lisa also felt that *Broadchurch* was overall positive, and challenged victim-blaming:

I think *Broadchurch* was slightly different in that they covered it quite well in a way. There was one comment that one of the officers on *Broadchurch* made, well there was a couple she was clearly the 'challenging' officer who'd said something like the rape had happened on the Saturday night and she hadn't reported it till the Monday something like 'oh that's a long time to report isn't it?' and then like the next episode she was 'oh so she was out drinking was she?'

The character of the "challenging' officer' Lisa describes appears to have been set up to clearly blame the victim in the case, with other characters countering this blame.

Soaps were also seen as important, and Samantha in particular felt that these could be a real positive source of information and change in attitudes around sexual violence. She used the example of an *Eastenders* storyline where a man raped his sister-in-law as helping her elderly mother to understand that rape is not just committed by strangers and dealt with the complexities of reporting and sexual violence within the family. She also felt these storylines could be beneficial to counselling clients:

I often find if there's a storyline going on in one of them, you hear it a few times that week. A client will say to you, 'oh are you watching *Coronation Street*? Did you know so-and-so got, you know, got attacked' and that they see it as positive as well and I've actually seen it I feel almost aid the moving on and the therapeutic process in that people don't feel so alone because it's happened to some soap opera character.

With soaps, Samantha felt that viewers were already familiar with and invested in the character affected, so may 'feel like they know them', and this could be what made soap storylines of sexual violence particularly resonate with victim-survivors.

However, soaps could also negatively impact victim-blaming of sexual violence. Jane felt there was 'danger in showing sensitive issues...cause it's not real, and it does happen in real life...I'm not sure what the *benefit* of watching it on telly is', although she did admit it could potentially raise awareness, if storylines were handled well. Samantha also raised the issue of actors in soaps being on trial for rape in real life, and how actors were conflated with their character:

A lot of people were saying that [*Coronation Street* actor] Michael Le Vell could never have [committed rape] because he's, you know, he's such a lovely mechanic with two daughters and I remember like 'yeah but that's not [him]'. So that one I don't know if because he played such a nice family man, that almost helped his case of getting off, people couldn't separate that.

The discussion of fictionalised accounts of sexual violence highlights an important and under-researched area. It is clear that these stories can resonate with and affect victim-survivors and could potentially be very important. If, as discussed in the media analysis findings, victim-survivors are absent from non-fiction accounts (such as news coverage), apart from what is known about them through court cases, then fictional victim-survivors present a potential avenue for real-life victim-survivors to identify with.

## **6.7 - Consequences of Media Coverage**

Participants were asked what they felt the consequences of media coverage of sexual violence were, a previously unresearched area, and there were several responses around this.

### 6.7.1 - Identifying Sexual Violence

Firstly, some of the supporters felt that media coverage of sexual violence could be a barrier to women identifying that they had even experienced rape. Danielle, for example, talked of a 'narrative' around sexual violence being present throughout women's lives, before they experience specific incidents of sexual violence, and how this forms and shapes women's understanding of sexual violence before it has even happened. The media helps to form and adds to it, with Danielle saying that if victim-survivors see particular attitudes in a newspaper, then 'of course you would pull those attitudes onto yourself and see them as not just talking about the woman in that article but talking about you', but that the narrative is already there, and has been developed from a variety of sources, including the media. Similarly, Leslie suggested that our 'sense making processes' draw upon the media, so we cannot detach our understanding of sexual violence from media content. When discussing the media possibly re-traumatising victim-survivors, Leslie pointed out that this 'relies on those women already being able to identify what's happened to them as rape', calling the media a 'major inhibitor of identification'. She added that women are drawing upon the media for their understanding what 'counts' as sexual violence, or 'inferring that their experiences [are] not as bad' because of what they have seen sexual violence be portrayed as in the media. She drew upon her experiences as a helpline worker, saying that:

It's more like they'll be piecing together little bits and they might be like 'oh well it's not like in *Corrie* when that happened', so they'll be making little links between little things and creating this little parameter of what they think counts as rape, and then because their experiences aren't being reflected...then they can't really infer that that is violence in the first place.

She drew upon the example of more focus being on cases where perpetrators are unknown to the victim (which, as we know from national statistics, is significantly rarer than when the perpetrator is known to the victim) and linked this to the media normalising abusive or manipulative behaviour in intimate relationships. Danielle also suggested that women may minimise their experiences based on what they see in the media, drawing upon Ched Evans as an example.

This is a significant issue – we know that media representations of sexual violence are often inaccurate, and that many women do not or wait to disclose the violence committed against

them, but the media might also be preventing women from ever identifying they have been raped, posing a major barrier for help-seeking.

### 6.7.2 - Reporting & Disclosing

Linked to this, many of the participants also discussed the media's influence on victim-survivors' decision to report sexual violence to the police or affecting their disclosure to their service. Leslie, for example, suggested that if a certain case had been in the media recently, there might be people ringing the helpline to disclose an incident similar or relating to that case. Similarly, Jane described the reporting around the Savile and Rochdale cases as having 'brought a load of new kind of clients in people referring themselves into counselling', as awareness was raised.

However, she also stated that some of the coverage, specifically around Savile, affecting reporting. She used the example of a documentary where women discussed their negative experiences in reporting, saying that, for the women she worked with, 'if you watch other people's experiences being terrible, it's not going to really give you inspiration to go and report', although she noted that 'I'm not saying that media don't give a realistic feel' in terms of police treatment of sexual violence victims. Similar to this, Jennifer said that she '[knew] for a fact from the women that I work with' that the media deters women from reporting to the police or, if they do choose to report, they prepare for it to be hard. For example, when talking about Ched Evans (discussed in further detail later), she said that the case added to 'the stress and trauma of their expectations of what's going to happen', and women 'expect to be harassed and trolled and not believed' if they report. Lisa echoed this, saying that coverage makes victim-survivors think they will not be believed, but that this goes throughout the whole criminal justice process:

They don't think they're going to be believed or they do think 'I'm going to go to court and the police aren't going to believe but even if I do get one of the 'good' officers who do believe me the CPS aren't going to believe me, then I've got to stand in front of a jury and the jury aren't going to believe me', so I think it's a drip down, a trickle-trickle of not believing them.

Whilst the media may or may not be accurately reflecting the current picture around reporting rape to the police, it cannot be denied that this is potentially preventing women from engaging with the criminal justice system.

However, Samantha did identify a positive side to this coverage, with some of the women she has worked with finding it 'almost quite like comforting that they're not alone' and this was echoed by Danielle, when she discussed the increased reporting following Savile:

I think some of that was a positive thing as well though. Some of it was what I said, they weren't able to cope, they couldn't get away from it but then some of it was actually feeling like going 'this wasn't just me', that 'me as well' affect, 'me too, this happened to me too' and it's okay to come forward after years and that legitimising of it can still affect you after years, so that recognition of historical can still be a crisis.

Here, we can see Danielle saying that whilst some of the coverage was affecting victim-survivors' ability to cope, there was also the positive where victim-survivors realised they were not alone, and (although these interviews took place before the emergence of #MeToo), they were able to find solidarity in women saying 'me too'. It also, Danielle argued, provides an important recognition of historical abuse for victim-survivors, and recognition that victim-survivors can still be affected by abuse years or decades after it took place.

Sheryl also said that she felt more women are reporting now than before:

I still think there's a lot of women don't report, a lot of women, more so now over the last few years have reported. You know when I first started many, many years ago, [I could] count on one hand people that I even knew who would even consider reporting, never mind [actually] reporting, and now you know my caseload's about twenty six clients...and I would say a quarter of them at least are going through the criminal justice process.

When asked if she thought media coverage had anything to do with this, replied 'I think it...gives them courage', as well as raising awareness about the services available to help victim-survivors. This highlights a potential positive side effect in amongst the negative consequences regarding media affecting reporting and disclosing to police around sexual violence.

### 6.7.3 - Belief

Tied in with worries around disclosing and reporting are worries about being believed, and this was raised by several of the supporters. When asked if she felt media coverage affected victim-survivors, Jennifer responded by saying 'massively, cause the first thing you get told is one, you're not going to be believed'. Sheryl also raised this when discussing reactions of 'why did she wait so long to come forward?' around Savile.

Related to Sheryl's comments about other people's responses during reporting around Savile, some of the participants suggested that it is not only the media itself which can be an issue for victim-survivors, but how the people around them *interact* with it. Leslie, for example, told me that she felt other people in victim-survivors' lives starting to discuss and make comments sexual violence is often 'as upsetting for some women...watching how they pass judgements, victim blame those people in a way that has very obvious implications for them'. She told me that, in her own experiences too, this had been something that she had found difficult and that it could be 'so gutting' to hear comments 'without people even being aware of it'. Jennifer added to this by referring to comments on social media from friends and family. Tanya had had a caller on the helpline tell her how difficult it was at work, and for everyone to want to know her opinion on a TV show, 'not because they know you're a survivor but because that's what everyone watched on TV last night', and to have it 'suddenly immediately back in her everyday life when she'd worked really hard to keep it separate'. She added that even if you never watch a depiction or read anything to do with sexual violence ever again, you cannot be isolated from it because of other people's interactions with media around it. Similarly, Samantha told me about a client who had, like the woman Tanya spoke to, found discussions at work difficult, and how she had to sit and listen to what everyone was saying about a certain programme, and would consider whether she should say something ('should I say that was, that was me, or actually that was a typical response or that was really accurate, that is what happens'), and had to decide how much she wanted to participate in the conversation. Samantha felt that this could lead to victim-survivors feeling isolated.

This highlights that the media can inform and stimulate public discussion, and therefore heightens its responsibility to report on sexual violence accurately and responsibly.

#### 6.7.4 - Engaging with Media

Like Tanya and Samantha discussed above, victim-survivors may choose not to engage with certain forms of media, and this was something raised by Jane and Samantha. Jane told me that a lot of her clients will try to avoid watching shows with rape in them, as it can be very triggering (which will be discussed next) and they can feel 'very passionate' about the characters, although she noted that some of her clients do watch shows about rape, despite it being potentially triggering. Samantha also shared that some women had told her 'I just can't pick up a newspaper at the moment', and shared one client's experience, where she would previously read the free paper on public transport (*Metro*, one of the publications included in the media analysis in Chapter 5) and had had to stop doing so, because it was 'just full of childhood sexual abuse' due to an ongoing police operation in the local area, and found this very triggering, and would 'always [be] frightened of what was on the next page'.

Being triggered and re-traumatised by the media was a common consequence of media that participants responded with. Samantha's client discussed above, had become 'almost very panicky' in public and needed to use coping strategies. Leslie described the range of affects that being re-traumatised can have, such as feeling depressed, angry, being really upset and being scared to leave the house, whilst Sheryl added use of self-harm and issues around control to this list.

#### 6.7.5 - Triggering Media Coverage

Related to this is a lack of warning for media which may be triggering. Tanya, for example, recalled a series of TV adverts which showed various scenarios, before the tagline 'this is rape' appeared – she used the example of a man and woman sitting on a sofa, with the man initiating sex and coercing the woman into it. Tanya wondered how these adverts might have affected women and wondered if women realised they had been raped through these adverts, and how the media can try to be 'good' and educate, but still negatively affect victim-survivors. Similarly, Tanya said that a local case, and the TV dramatization *Three Girls* had been discussed repeatedly on the helpline, and for one caller it had been particularly difficult as the show correlated strongly with her own experiences and, as she told Tanya, 'there was no warning, nobody told me that was coming'. Similarly, on a documentary about abuse

committed in Rotherham, Samantha told me that some of her clients had preferred that there was coverage before the documentary aired, as then people could decide in advance whether they would watch it. Warnings before the programme, Samantha reflected, were often not 'quite enough', as it may say there would be graphic violence, but not explicitly warn of sexual violence.

With high volumes of coverage, such as around high-profile cases, avoiding the media also proved difficult for victim-survivors, the supporters told me:

They see it everywhere, they can't get away from it. They switch the television on, the radio, they pick up a newspaper, they go online, it's there constantly, and there seems to be no respite, and it sometimes almost feels like they're being attacked, again in a different way, and bombarded sometimes by it. And it just reinforces things that might already be there that they're thinking themselves. (Sheryl)

Danielle also described the 'constant presence of the story line' (acknowledging that the language of 'story line' itself felt uncomfortable for her) around reporting of Savile, and how calls to both their centre and the national Rape Crisis helpline 'just went...sky high', so Rape Crisis centres across the country began experiencing more women coming forward. She described Savile as being 'constantly there', as well as the use of 'demonic images' that were featured in the coverage of him, and for the women either already using the service, or the women who came to the service as a result of the coverage, were finding the coverage itself, and the sheer volume of it difficult.

#### 6.7.6 - Self-Blame

The final consequence supporters reported was feelings of self-blame, and each participant reported having worked with victim-survivors experiencing self-blame, and identified that many, if not all, victim-survivors had experienced self-blame:

I would say...the majority...of calls and emails...the majority of women who use the helpline and email support come with victim-blaming attitudes about themselves and I would say that I struggle to think of...any women and girls I have supported that I haven't done that bit of work with like I'm sure there's a few because I've been doing

it a long time (laughs) but I would say that definitely that's part of, and even you know I would love to say it's part of the first time I speak to somebody and then we never do it again and that's it, it's a constant thing with women and girls around this was not your fault, that constantly, women who are calling for a long time still identifying where this blame lies. (Danielle)

As discussed around the nature of support offered by specialist services earlier, this challenging of self-blame is not a single occurrence, but needs to be constant and consistent when supporting victim-survivors. Leslie also reflected on the importance of this, sharing an experience with a helpline caller who had had a particularly negative response when reporting. Jane described many of the women she had worked with as already feeling 'ashamed', 'dirty' and 'used' and feeling 'guilty enough' without other people blaming them. Lisa described the questions around 'why didn't I do this?' as 'the really quiet questions that probably sit with them...they do kind of dwell on them', and this being picked up from the media. Tanya and Jennifer described the role that the media might play in this:

I mean we know that survivors of sexual violence often experience feelings of guilt, those questions of 'what if' or 'if only I hadn't' kind of scenarios play out in their head and I think if you then have a news article that appears to portion some of the blame to the woman that just reinforces those feelings and I can imagine that must be really difficult when you're already wrestling with those feelings. (Tanya)

Women are actually coming in saying 'well I shouldn't have been drunk, but I did, I was hitting on him earlier in the night, but I was alone' and...they'll use the kind of terms and frames, the myths that the media tells them, they will have like internalised [these]. (Jennifer)

The media could therefore play a significant role in reducing a source of blame from victim-survivor's lives.

## **6.8 - Presentations in the Media**

When discussing media coverage of sexual violence, participants often drew upon presentations of victims, perpetrators, women or gender as a whole, and the criminal justice

system that they had seen, and their discussions of these will be discussed here. Ched Evans and his case was also often discussed here, but this will be discussed later in the chapter.

### 6.8.1 - Of Victim-Survivors

With representations of victims, participants often mentioned the rape myths that media coverage would draw upon when discussing sexual violence. Tanya described this as being 'quite insidious', for example, 'any mention of a victim's sexual history is automatically planting into the readers' or the watchers' mind that...that has something to do with it', and this was echoed by other participants. Before going onto discuss the examples of this she had seen, Leslie, for example, suggested that 'you'd be more looking for examples of where they promote...perpetrator blaming' because victim-blaming is so commonplace. Sheryl also raised the use of rape myths in the media as an issue, saying it was intended to shock people, but also (mis)informs the public about why sexual violence happens. Danielle also felt the media promoted victim-blaming in the ways victims were talked about, even when 'they think they're being really good and they talk about how good the woman was...how she was acting in all the right ways', creating a hierarchy of victims that the press feeds into.

Jane told me about a client she had worked with, who was a victim of abuse committed by a high-profile perpetrator (who she requested would not be named to ensure her client's confidentiality), and who received media attention. Jane told me that her client 'wished she'd never done it' (i.e. been in the media) because of how she and other victims were portrayed as wanting money and fame.

The supporters also discussed the gendered notions of victims of child sexual abuse when discussing representations of victims. In particular, they drew upon the example of the sexual abuse of young boys committed by football coaches such as Barry Bennell, which received widespread attention in the media from late-2016, as adult men came forward. Bennell was found guilty of 43 charges and sentenced to 30 years imprisonment in February 2018. Jennifer noted how this differed from coverage of violence against women and girls:

The first time you've ever heard people reporting and it was sensitive to the victims was when those male footballers came forward like how were they to come forward,

they're so brave but a part of that, even when they report on children who have been raped...I'm yet to read a single article reporting on sexual violence against women that hasn't had some sort victim-blaming in it. (Jennifer)

Whilst Lisa compared it to the coverage of the abuse committed by Jimmy Savile, and how she felt the adult men were believed much more readily than the woman who disclosed being abused by Savile:

Lisa: So for women...Jimmy Savile was a big one, everyone goes 'hmm, well I'm going to need more information than that', and the football scandal broke about a load of young boys, everyone went 'you are so brave for speaking out, we need to do this, this this and this, well done you', whereas for women, 'what were you doing, you must have been a bit of a flirt', like there's something about women's behaviour being a causing reason for rape whereas nothing boys did. Girls can do something to cause [rape], boys can't.

Researcher: So you feel that it's gendered?

Lisa: Oh yeah, totally, yeah.

Similarly, Leslie also discussed the gendered reporting of child sexual abuse:

Leslie: I think it's also weird cause like with the whole media reporting of like children and then they don't gender the children in the reporting as well so you end up with these kind of like strange categories of like children, men and women ...then they're like talking about the men in present day...I think it's the same with the media reporting cause it's like 'oh it's so awful for the children' but then it's like but they're adult men now...and then they report it differently

Researcher: So children are almost seen as being without gender?

Leslie: Yeah, definitely, I think that's definitely the case um, in like media reporting and then they often draw on gender to like I think sometimes to like stress how much more potentially how like worse it is if it's like boys.

As we can see from the quote above then, Leslie argues that children are reported almost as a separate category from men and women, and therefore are seen as being without gender, leading to a dangerous lack of gendered analysis when looking at violence against women and

children. She also suggests that abuse against boys is seen as being 'worse', drawing upon the idea that abuse and sexual violence is 'normal' within women and girls' lives.

### 6.8.2 - Of Perpetrators

Moving onto presentations of perpetrators, Danielle reflected that Savile was '*really* demonised and that really affected women'. This was echoed by Tanya, who, whilst not naming Savile specifically, said that those who abuse children are labelled as monsters, which, she felt, did take away some of the blame from victims, but did not place it onto perpetrators. Jennifer suggested that the reporting around Savile was sensationalist, whilst the coverage of the Rotherham abuse became about 'the failings of the police and these Asian men, so the focus was on the Asian men'. This was also an issue raised by Lisa, when discussing a local case where a woman was raped by a group of men. The case was picked up upon by right-wing, anti-immigration groups, who, Lisa said, 'don't really care about this woman, she's just...[their] poster girl'.

Much of the discussion around representations of perpetrators revolved around Ched Evans, and this will be explored next.

## 6.9 - The Ched Evans Case

A set of questions asked participants about their experiences of seeing media around, and supporting victim-survivors during, the trial and retrial of Ched Evans, although the case also arose naturally in other areas in many of the interviews.

After clarifying whether they were familiar with Evans' case, supporters were asked whether they remembered any coverage around the trial and retrial as being particularly positive or negative, or standing out to them. This elicited similar responses from some of the participants:

There was nothing good about the coverage! I can't remember anything about the coverage of Ched Evans that has been good. (Danielle)

Researcher: Moving on to talk specifically about the case of Ched Evans...

Tanya: (sighs) yes

Researcher: Was there anything about the coverage, either good or bad, that stood out to you?

Tanya: Yes, absolutely, it was all bad. It was really, I thought, it was desperately unfair.

Did I see any good? I don't think I did, I can't remember, I think if I ever have, it's been overshadowed by all the negativity, and all victim-blaming, it was all victim-blaming, no responsibility was taken by those who were actually the perpetrators who'd done that to that poor woman, not the other way round. (Sheryl)

For the supporters, it became clear that coverage around the case felt overwhelmingly negative in terms of blaming the woman in the case, with there being little positive coverage that stood out. What did stand out for the supporters, however, was the blame and abuse the woman in the case received, and the use of her sexual history in the retrial. Danielle described the abuse she faced as 'really disturbing and really violent', whilst others said:

Some of the, some of the key stuff that stood out was the way in which the victim's...[the] way her relationships and sexual history were called into question as if that was relevant, like as if that was actually relevant (sighs) disgusting. Um, absolutely disgusting. (Leslie)

The fact that they the defence were allowed to bring witnesses to describe the victim's previous sexual experience just seems to me absurd, I saw a lot of pictures of CCTV footage that I think really altered people's minds because you know the woman wasn't dragged in screaming or visibly resisting, I think that changed people's perceptions of what had gone on in that situation... I think it was a really great example of awful coverage that really re-victimised that woman over and over and over and over. (Tanya)

Jane described some of the abuse the woman faced online: 'people slagging her off, saying she was making it up, and she's a slut and a slag', whilst Lisa recalled comments about the woman such as 'well she was out drinking, she's a slapper, she had sex with loads of men'.

The supporters also brought up the fears that the coverage raised for the women they were supporting. The woman being named during and after the original trial and the retrial raised concerns about anonymity for the victim-survivors the participants were working with. Sheryl, for example, said:

[They're] worried that if they reported that the same would happen to them, that their name would get leaked. That they wouldn't have anonymity...they don't realise that they're actually protected by that, and you know if anything did happen it would be an offence in itself. But once it's out there you can't take it back, so it's well and good us saying that but how can you guarantee it's not going to happen, once it happens, it happens. And even if you sue somebody it doesn't make it better because it's happened. It's not like you can make it unhappen and all the money in the world isn't going to make that feel any better.

Danielle suggested that anonymity is at risk even without the victim-survivor's name appearing in the press:

Anonymity is (pause) not as real a thing for women and girls, like they may not have their name in the paper, but if they're, if they're experiencing rape and abuse from somebody that is known to them, which they will, and they chose to go and report, the chances are the people around them will know even if they don't tell anyone, they can't control what he's doing.

Danielle said she had drawn parallels with this happening to the women she had supported and the Evans retrial. Jennifer added that her clients had identified with the woman in the case, and felt that something similar could happen to them if they were to report. She told me about a client whose case had been similar, in that her perpetrator was a high-profile athlete, and she identified 'immediately with the Ched Evans case as a reason why, either why not to report, or when I report, this is what I'm going to go through'.

For some of the victim-survivors the supporters worked with, the case also raised worries about retrials:

I feel retrials are probably quite influential especially because obviously sometimes they crop up for clients when they themselves are still waiting for their first trial, or have literally just had their first trial and then become absolutely terrified there'll be a retrial. (Leslie)

For the supporters, how Evans was portrayed was also significant. Danielle, for example, felt that Evans was 'painted as the victim consistently'. Similarly, Leslie suggested that the language used to describe Evans after she was found not guilty was incredibly similar to the list of effects of sexual violence a victim-survivor might read:

Everybody has this idea of course that it's very, very unjust that a young and successful and attractive man like him should have his whole career ruined, so the whole media coverage that I've seen has literally been about how awful, how devastating that must be, literally like I laughed at one point because almost every word they were describing how awful it was to be accused was literally like all the words that you would read in any standard like symptoms list of what it's like to actually be assaulted, like you'd be devastated, you'd live in fear, you'd have very bad flashbacks. (Leslie)

Leslie also described Evans (and fellow footballer Adam Johnson) as being seen as the 'perfect victims of lying women', and she linked this to both the men's status as being in monogamous relationships with conventionally attractive women, and as being fathers, meaning that the woman and girl in Evans' and Johnson's case were seen as 'breaking up happy homes'. The media, Leslie felt, were 'obsessed with him not being guilty'. Tanya added to this, saying Evans' fiancée supporting him made people doubt the woman in the case because 'he couldn't have possibly have done this with this...because he had this beautiful girlfriend'. Presentations of perpetrators are therefore key, and some of the presentations of Evans were discussed in the media analysis findings chapter.

The interviews also highlighted that the Evans case was affecting perpetrators, offering guidance for how to navigate their own trials. For example, Samantha told me about a woman she had supported through a trial where the man on trial had adopted similar strategies to Evans. He had hired a defence barrister and a private investigator, who had shown up at the homes of men the woman had dated asking leading questions ('Oh did you think she was a

bit wacky'... that's the kind of stuff he was asking, 'was she a very emotional type of woman?') and followed her as she drove whilst her daughter was also in the car. For Samantha, Ched Evans seemed to be 'actually where they got their knowledge from' which enabled them to carry out these methods. This highlights that media coverage is not just affecting victim-survivors of rape but is also sending messages to potential or existing rapists.

Some of the supporters also identified the case affecting how they were supporting victim-survivors. Samantha, for example, said it made her role 'harder in a way', as with cases such as this going on, 'people are looking at you and saying 'do you think my case might be different?' and...I don't really have that much confidence that it will be that different'. For Danielle and Jennifer, they described the case as having provided them with an obvious example of 'victim-blaming in the media and injustice in the criminal justice system', as Jennifer described it. For Lisa, she said that she became even more aware of self-blame when she was supporting victim-survivors on the helpline.

Ched Evans' trial and retrial had implications for not only Evans himself and the woman in the case, but victim-survivors of sexual violence much more widely, as well as those who support them, but also potentially for perpetrators of sexual violence as well.

## **6.10 - Creating Change in Media Reporting of Rape**

One question in the interview asked the supporters how they felt activists, practitioners and victim-survivors could go about creating change in the media coverage of sexual violence. For some of the participants, this would be done through more collaboration and engagement with journalists and those in the media:

Talking to journalists before stories go out, feeding into their stories, being part of their stories...being really there to support and help the people that are writing this stuff, putting those reports out to understand what they're actually dealing with and what they're talking about, rather than just getting a story out. Getting a story out that raises you know sensationalises raises anxiety with people to sell a paper or whatever,

but also quality reporting with a true voice, backed up with knowledge, experience and evidence. (Sheryl)

For Sheryl, this was particularly key, as she felt that the media could 'really help the public to understand the victim's point of view', and could play a very big role in challenging victim-blaming.

Others talked more of activism and awareness raising in order to create this change:

I think it's about...challenging people so maybe the individual, either the papers or the journalists. (Jennifer)

We've done campaigns in the past that, the centre, raising awareness ...one of my colleagues does a lot of training, and other organisations might contact us to say could you come to do a talk at social services, or police or whatever, raising awareness that way, going into colleges, unis. (Jane)

Similarly, Danielle talked of being part of the national Rape Crisis network, and doing advocacy and activism both on this level, and at a local level.

Some were more pessimistic about the possibility of change being created, with Jennifer acknowledging that, although directly challenging the media is a way of creating change, that for 'a lot of newspapers...getting called out actually just gives them more attention...I don't know how effective that can be'. Tanya commented that whilst she felt that 'most things start with the media', she also felt that 'most people like to think that they're not susceptible' to messages in the media.

### **6.11 - 'If You Could Change One Thing...'**

The final question of the interviews with supporters was 'if you could change one thing about how the media reports sexual violence, what would it be?', and responses to this tended to be quite similar in theme.

Sheryl simply stated that the media needs to 'stop blaming the victims', and make it clear who is really to blame. She put this down to an 'absolute lack of understanding'. Similarly, Jane felt that the media needed to 'tell the truth' and recognise the victim as a victim 'no matter who she is, what she does, what she looks like', and not criticise her for the sake of ratings or sales.

Tanya suggested that the focus needed to shift away from the victim and become more on the perpetrators of sexual violence. She stated that she did not want to know about characteristics or behaviours of the victim, but she did want to know about the characteristics of the perpetrator, such as questioning whether he had a history of committing sexual violence. She felt that the only time there is such significant focus on the perpetrator in high-profile or serial cases, but that she would like to see more coverage on 'what led up to those actions of his part, cause at some point he's made a choice to rape somebody'. Likewise, Jennifer felt that descriptions of the victim were unhelpful, and, like Tanya, that the focus should be on perpetrators instead. Jennifer discussed the 'value judgements' and 'emotive language' inherent in reporting sexual violence and the descriptions of victims, using the example of being a single mother, or descriptions of what the women was wearing at the time. Similarly, Lisa wanted to see an end to the 'perfect perpetrator and perfect victim', drawing upon the local case picked up by right-wing groups discussed earlier, and the idea that certain types of men could not perpetuate sexual violence.

Both Danielle and Samantha discussed a sort of filter or screening process for journalists. Danielle was uncertain as to what this filter would look like but suggested that journalists could consider 'how socially responsible is the reporting on this case?', or for them to have an understanding of how victim-blaming works and address it within themselves, which would eliminate victim-blaming from their writing. She felt that some reporting was intentionally sensationalist, but that some was not intended to be sensationalist or victim-blaming, and that journalists might 'think they are being good', when they are actually asking women to do safety work. Both Danielle and Samantha suggested having an expert to check reporting on sexual violence (which, Samantha pointed out, should be the job of the editor), whilst Samantha also recommended incentivising journalists to make them more accountable for their reporting, as the current system of writing to the press commission did not seem effective. Similar to this, Leslie argued for clearer standards about what can and cannot be

published, so, for example, only being able to include information that is relevant to the case; she used an example of the *Daily Mail* including a clip from a pornographic film in their reporting of a woman who had been drugged and kidnapped. She also wanted to see an end to reporting of information that had not been made available to the public, or ideological facts (such as a victim's sexual history), and a clearer distinction between reporting and opinion pieces so as to avoid conflating opinion with news.

The above, then, shows that news reporting of sexual violence could be improved dramatically. Whilst some of the suggestions are possibly not instantly feasible, some could be introduced, such as more accountability or incentives for journalists to report sexual violence more responsibly or a change in standards about what can be conveyed when reporting on a case of sexual violence. Similarly, Danielle's suggestion of journalists having a greater understanding of victim-blaming could be implemented through training, whilst Tanya and Jennifer's idea of less superfluous information on the victim, with greater focus on the actions of the perpetrator could also be implanted through a slight change in focus for journalists reporting on cases. This is not to suggest that these changes could be implemented overnight, but it offers some clear suggestions around how the media could change to produce a more responsible and accurate, and less victim-blaming, portrayal of sexual violence.

## **6.12 - Summary**

A total of eight interviews were conducted with supporters of victim-survivors of sexual violence, all working or volunteering within Rape Crisis centres. A number of issues were raised, including a variety of consequences that media coverage of sexual violence can have on victim-survivors, such as re-traumatising and deterring women from reporting to the police. These consequences are mostly negative, however, it is worth noting that some identified positive consequences, such as courage from seeing other victim-survivors, whether in fictional or factual coverage. As well as this, the findings offer implications for those working within journalism and the media around what could be changed to improve coverage. The findings also raise issues for further research, such as around fictional accounts of sexual violence (such as in TV dramas or soaps), and what these may mean for victim-

survivors, and highlighted a need for greater understanding about how perpetrators of sexual violence are understanding and using the media.

## Chapter 7 – Interviews with Victim-Survivors

### 7.1 - Introduction

A total of fifteen women victim-survivors were interviewed in early autumn 2017. This chapter examines how the participants defined victim-blaming, before discussing the presentation of victims, perpetrators, the criminal justice system and rape in the media. The coverage of Ched Evans' retrial for rape will then be discussed, followed by discussion of other high-profile cases raised by the women interviewed. Different forms of media will then be examined, before moving on to looking at the consequences participants identified the media as having had on them. The final section will look at what the interviewees would change in the media, before the chapter comes to a conclusion.

### 7.2 - Defining Victim-Blaming

The opening questions of the interviews revolved around victim-blaming, including what the term victim-blaming meant to participants and what they thought it meant. The most common response here was to talk about the victim being held responsible:

That the victim is blamed for rape. So it could be the way that a woman dresses, the way that a woman is, it's various different things. (Natasha)

When you put responsibility for a crime onto the person who suffered at the hands of somebody else, usually it is in terms of sexual assault, but not always, I mean you could victim blame people for having their car stolen or their wallet lifted but people very rarely do seem to. (Rosie)

Blaming the victim for what's happened to them or implying through, somehow, through behaviour of the victim it's their fault what happened to them. (Shauna)

It means that in some way something that I did, part of my behaviour resulted in me deserving to be assaulted and raped. (Sophie)

Skye also suggested that not only is the victim blamed, but their legitimacy as a person is undermined through victim-blaming:

Skye: I think of it ... not just blaming the person that it happened but it also seems to involve like the sort of undermining their sexuality and...kind of like dismissing them completely, rather than just blaming them for the specific thing

Researcher: Yeah, so undermining them as a person?

Skye: Yeah, like their legitimacy to like even make statement about something that's happened to them.

Like the supporters, participants here also referred back to common rape myths when discussing victim-blaming that are used to responsabilise the victim:

She had it coming, what did she expect, she was wearing such and such or oh well you know what he's like, what did she think was going to happen. (Rosie)

Saying like 'oh this might have been your fault, you should have dressed differently or you shouldn't have had that many drinks'...all those good things (laughs). (Emily)

Similarly, Naomi felt there was 'a standard of who is rapeable and who isn't rapeable', drawing on her own experiences of others not seeing her husband as able to rape her, but this changing when she became pregnant.

Some also discussed the perpetrator here, linking the victim's responsibility to the perpetrator's lack of responsibility, with Ruth describing victim-blaming as being like 'wallpaper':

It's like wallpaper, isn't it, it's just everywhere. It's about completely and utterly talking about the victim of the crime, not the perpetrator of the crime and so focusing on aspects of that woman's behaviour...it's about woman's behaviour, dress, previous life...I think I know more about the young woman that Ched Evans raped, and I'm still going to believe that he raped her, than I do about him...I think it just starts from a fundamental premise of I don't believe her, and I try very hard to start from a fundamental premise of I believe her. (Ruth)

It means if somebody experiences sexual violence or harassment, the onus of that is turned around onto them, so for example questions are asked about what were you wearing, were you drinking alcohol, the implication there that it was their fault rather than the fault of the person who actually did the action so this doesn't have to necessarily be outright blaming someone but the implication that they could have done something to stop it and therefore it's kind of their fault. (Julia)

Naomi described victim-blaming as being both individual and structural:

I think it exists on both a[n] individual and a structural level so I think, I think there's a psychological necessity for when we are subjected to violence for us to self-blame because it enables us to feel like we had some control and power and so I think on one level as an individual there is like victim-blaming is almost a necessary psychological strategy...Then there's kind of structurally in the media in political kind of decision making...it's on lots of different levels...like self-blame then there's kind of interpersonal blame, community blame, structural.

Participants also discussed what they felt the role victim-blaming played was, and what it personally meant for them:

All victim-blaming does is distract from the point that it's a very real issue and it's something that isn't about what someone's wearing, what they were doing, whether they were drunk, whatever, it's very much like a power play. But it's also like an entitlement thing as well because it comes down to the fact that because like back to the issue of men being entitled to women's bodies. (Bianca)

It means that we haven't achieved the progress I want us to as a society that treats women equally because it frequently, it's not just describing behaviour, frequently it implies um, it describes behaviour that is still existing so presently as, as really common. People do continually blame victims, it's a phenomenon, not just a description um and I think that's, it makes me very sad and very angry because I think, we can't, you know I can't quite believe we're still here. (Ruth)

There are clear elements here in what the women felt victim-blaming was and what it meant.

### **7.3 - Presentations in Media**

One of the key topics raised in the interviews was how different aspects related to sexual violence were presented in the media, and these will be discussed below.

#### **7.3.1 - Of Victim-Survivors**

Participants discussed how victim-survivors were portrayed in the media, drawing upon a range of different themes.

Some discussion revolved around the idea of there being 'good' and 'bad' victims i.e. those who had done everything 'right' to avoid being raped (good victims) and those who had led to their rape (bad victims). This was often linked to ideas around rape myths:

Cause sometimes they portray, especially if someone has been out drinking or might have worn a skirt or whatever, they portray them as maybe a bit too willing and just stupid. (Emily)

This also played into ideas of who could be seen as being raped, which differed between participants:

People who are raped look a certain way, they're always like young, conventionally attractive women who are like by themselves...it means that any scenario that deviates from that rhetoric tends to be considered slander or untrue. (Bianca)

Shauna: I've read some cases recently, where the victim has been a very elderly woman and like in those cases the blame is always square on the attacker and it's, it almost feels as though it's only elderly women who are given this freedom to be a victim

Researcher: So they're almost seen as almost always being a victim, do you think?

Shauna: Yeah, and like that would go for children too, but there's this gap in between...where it's about what you were wearing and how much you've been drinking.

This was something Bianca referenced again when discussing the kidnapping of a glamour model, who fit within the 'bad' victim category, despite meeting the criteria of being young and conventionally attractive she described above:

So she was a glamour model or she did naked modelling of some form and she was young and she was beautiful and like she had some plastic surgery done so she ticked all the boxes of a person they were going to throw under the bus.

Therefore, meeting the criteria of being young and attractive were not protecting factors from the aspects that made her a 'bad' victim, such as the glamour modelling, and these overruled any of the 'good' victim criteria Bianca described. Like Shauna, she felt age was key, saying 'I don't think I've ever seen a story of someone maybe over the age of thirteen or fourteen who has been a victim of rape who hasn't [been blamed]'.

Bianca also felt that journalists would be 'going out of their way to find things on the victim that would make them look like the kind of person that would like inspire sexual assault'. Bianca and Tess both used the example of the blame Adam Johnson's victim received in the media, and this will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Sophie discussed another

high-profile case, that of *Dragon's Den* panel member Doug Richard, which will also be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, but she felt that how the victims in that case were portrayed in the media applied to the treatment of women in many other cases:

It just revealed how females are still regarded by so many as sort of strange characters that can, like those mermaids that can lure sailors to their deaths, it's such an unreal version of the power dynamics between genders and that kind of, it shocked me and it sort of leaves me feeling very vulnerable and very unbalanced.

Rosie had also witnessed this blaming attitude in opinion pieces in newspapers, including from those who would describe themselves as feminists:

I mean, Caitlin Moran who's like feminist...was not that long ago in the *Guardian* probably, saying 'I hear ladies clip clopping down the road at night in their high heels and I just could murder them really easily', and I'm just like 'Alarm! What is that your reaction to hearing ladies in shoes?'...But like pretty much a lot of the general commentary's opinions are 'yeah, but have you considered not being raped?'

For some, victims being presented as fragile, even when journalists were trying to be sympathetic, became key:

But then there's definitely, I think, a press where they're trying to be empathetic to the victim but I worry it feels like we're in a way being made to feel as we're such fragile beings, that actually the fragility of us becomes almost part, a weird part of blaming, and I know journalists are trying to be sympathetic, but actually, we're all just normal people...and I don't often see that kind of normality represented...I feel very either completely that I was asking for it, or that in some ways I was too good for this world (laughs). (Sophie)

Another way that the media reports on rape victims or like gives this perception of rape victims is like they're damaged goods...so if I tell someone I was raped when I was a teenager...they have so many stereotypes in their head about what that must have done to me. (Bianca)

For Bianca, this had even affected her interactions with friends:

I think like when friends talk who do know about it ask me about it, they're almost like doubtful about whether it happened because I'm so okay with it which...begs the question why do I have to *act* damaged for the rest of my life to be validated?

She also named specific TV portrayals which she felt had contributed to this idea of victims being damaged, and these will be discussed later in the chapter.

The presentation of victims was clearly a large issue for many of the participants, from being blamed but also the issue of the media missing the mark when trying to be sympathetic to victim-survivors of rape.

### 7.3.2 - Perpetrators

Whilst perpetrators were discussed by participants, this was done through conversations around high-profile cases and how perpetrators in those situations were presented (such as Ched Evans, Brock Turner and Adam Johnson), so will be discussed later in the chapter. However, Bianca did suggest that, as with stereotypes about victims, there were stereotypes for how perpetrators must be:

I think a lot of it also comes down to like incorrect stereotypes so like the stereotype that a well-groomed attractive man can't be a rapist, that a rapist looks a certain way....I think people have this perception that the kind of people that like violently force themselves upon others...have no other option...they're the kind of gross people that wouldn't be able to have normal relationships...I think that's really, that's quite a damaging rhetoric because it inspires this idea that rapists look a certain way.

### 7.3.3 - Of Rape

When it came to how rape itself was portrayed, the women interviewed often pointed towards it being heavily sexualised:

It's also sort of like quite often a thing of like when you're reading about a sexual assault case, like he *yanked* her hair, or, and then she was sodomised and there's a lot of extremely like (whispers) 'I really want to paint a picture cause it's kind of sexy' (normal voice) and it's really not sexy, please stop. Like the victim doesn't need every single person knowing that she was anally raped...this kind of detail is designed exactly to be salacious. (Rosie)

Similarly, Skye commented on how people want to hear 'all the little gory details and it's like a, it's just a tabloid thing', and Tess felt that the media would 'glorify' rape, saying 'they don't see it as people who are hurt, vulnerable, families torn apart'. Rosie also wondered how this was for the women in these cases:

As well as like being raped and being sexually assaulted, you also then have your consent violated because your police report goes to everyone...it feels like it's a, a way of taking control and consent away from the victims, but it's also just a really gross thing to experience in the world and see constantly and be bombarded with quite graphic details of.

When discussing the case of the woman who was kidnapped who had worked as a glamour model, Bianca recalled that the *Daily Mail* included photos of her nude in their articles, with it being 'that very clever, subtle insinuation, like they never said it...but it was very heavily implied that she was some sort of dumb bimbo who gets her tits out'.

There were also issues raised around representing the reality of rape, and Bianca pointed out that she disliked it when media would use the word 'sex' instead of 'rape', as it 'creates some sort of interchangeability between the word sex and rape', leading to 'blurred boundaries around consent'.

Naomi, who was raped by her then-husband, said:

Now I look back and think the reporting of sexual violence, that is just that constant drip drip drip of like the only real form of sexual violence being stranger rape.

This leads into participants talking about seeing their own experiences, or the lack of this, reflected in the media. Continuing from above, Naomi identified a 'silver lining' in not seeing her experiences of being raped in marriage in the media:

I suppose because the sexual violence I was subjected to wasn't from a stranger, a lot of the victim-blaming messages around what you shouldn't be wearing or where you shouldn't be going didn't impact me in the way they might somebody who was assaulted by a stranger.

This was echoed by Skye, who was also raped by the person she was in a relationship with. However, both Skye and Naomi also identified that coverage affected her idea of what sexual violence was, and this will be discussed in more detail when looking at what consequences participants felt media was having on victim-survivors. Similarly, Natasha identified it was 'interesting' to see others' experiences of sexual violence in the media that differed from her own.

Jessica had a particularly difficult experience and told me about reading an article about a 'similar attack on someone else in more or less the same area' as her own rape, and she immediately was worried about it being the same perpetrator. In the article, a man had been arrested, questioned and then released, which for Jessica 'seemed very, it felt very familiar'. She also felt that because of the way the article reported the man as having been released with no charge, that it came across as 'obviously he's...innocent', whilst also suggesting that the victim was seeking attention. Jessica told me seeing the article led her to feeling guilty and upset, as she 'hadn't got very far with trying to report things, I felt bad that I hadn't pushed that harder'. It led her to go back to the police:

In the end, I did go back to the police not long after that and I said 'Now look, I've seen this article' – not quite so calm as this (laughs) – 'you know, I've seen this article, I've got a feeling this is the same person, but I already complained...and they were like 'well we can't tell you anything', and I went 'I'm not asking you to tell me anything, you know, I'm asking you to consider this might be the same person' and they were a bit unhelpful really, just to put a fine point on it (laughs).

She described herself as having felt 'compelled' to raise the issue with the police, despite her similarly unhelpful experiences having tried to report the rape previously, and identified the article as having 'triggered that whole thing', saying:

I wonder, if that article had been presented in a very different way, it probably wouldn't have prompted such a significant kind of reaction, and you know, but I remember feeling very kind of anxious and depressed for quite a while after that.

Reflecting on her experiences with the police, and reading that particular article, Jessica commented that 'the media feeds into the way the police are, the police feed into the way the media are'.

However, Jessica also felt that, overall, media reporting has improved, or at least 'it's become more subtle...they're a little bit more carefully usually', and pointed to coverage of child abuse as evidence of this, with public opinion shifting, and newspapers as either following or leading on this:

Especially really kind of popular papers and things, they obviously want to get readers...so if they think that the mood of the public is changing or has changed then they will automatically have to respond to that because if they don't, then they're going to go bust, aren't they?

However, Kate disagreed with this, also hinting at how widespread coverage of sexual violence has become:

When it happened to me...it wasn't this openly spoken about, now every time you turn the telly on...attitudes seem to have changed towards it you know, instead of blaming the person that committed the crime, you blame the person that it's happened to...it shouldn't be the norm, it should be where it was years ago where it's not really an openly discussed kind of topic.

### 7.3.4 - Criminal Justice System

Presentations of the criminal justice system in the media were discussed in a number of ways by participants, most notably around reporting, but also involving false allegations.

Shauna recalled seeing a report about a false allegation which had caused her distress as, at that point, 'that was my absolute worst nightmare'. For Shauna, it was not necessarily the report that was upsetting, but the idea of a woman being charged with making a false accusation which felt like victim-blaming for her. In order to somewhat negate this, the report could have included statistics on false allegations, and how rare they are in cases of rape. This was something Bianca reflected on, saying 'the media doesn't do enough to hammer home how rare false rape allegations are' and makes the ones that do happen high-profile. This, she felt, was in contrast with low conviction rates for rape, and how under-discussed this is in the media 'because it's not what people want to hear, they want to hear all these awful horrid women are lying'. Julia also commented on this, saying 'people seem to think that rape is something where the false accusations are through the roof', and put this down to a 'disrespect' and distrust for women. When it came to media coverage of false rape accusations, she said:

Unless you're going to look at a news report about I don't know tax evasion, or someone saying my house was robbed or my car was broken into and be like 'you're probably lying', unless you're going to do that with every single crime, you shouldn't be doing it about this.

This was also echoed by Jessica:

It's always reported this liar has cause[d] this man's life to be ruined, you know, that kind of idea, isn't it? And it's so kind of everywhere, yet there are rapes and sexual assaults and other things that go on every day, day in, day out, that are never known or reported or spoken of, or any of that, you don't often see mainstream kind of programmes or papers or anything reflecting that other side...as opposed to the people who get convicted and lie, which is like the big news, isn't it? There's an awful lot more that goes on which would never be reported.

Jessica also discussed the ITV drama *Liar* (which, as noted in Chapter 4, led to a woman withdrawing from the research), saying that the name alone means ‘we’re supposed to wonder is she lying or is she not lying’. She felt that the media needed to be more careful with language:

I think they should be a little bit more careful I suppose about using terms like that, I just don’t think it’s particularly helpful really, you know, to suggest that, I think it’s so rare for women in particular to lie, I mean actually anybody to lie about being raped is so rare but to lie about...raping is quite common, you know, I suppose I feel like it’s all very unbalanced the way, in the way that it’s represented. (Jessica)

Jessica raises a key point here about who is most likely to lie about rape – those who have committed it. However, with regards to affecting women reporting, Kate had mixed feelings about whether it would be positive or negative.

As well as the above, Kate felt that a key flaw of news coverage was that ‘you don’t often hear of victims getting justice unless they’re big, big cases’, pointing out that there is a lack of positive outcomes in the media in relation to appeals for information or court cases. Similarly, Kate, who was receiving counselling from her local Rape Crisis, felt that there was a lack of visibility for specialist sexual violence services in the media despite that ‘these save people’s lives’, saying that ‘victims sometimes don’t know that these services are available, I didn’t know these services were available until I needed it’. For her, follow up to previous appeals or cases resulting in a guilty verdict, as well as greater coverage on the work of Rape Crisis was needed. Sophie echoed some of Kate’s sentiments, saying she felt you did not hear about cases making it to court. She suggested more articles and TV shows exploring the criminal justice system and rape cases, saying ‘I think there’s so much about the whole process that you don’t know until you’re in it’, and that it would be beneficial to have more information available. She suggested topics on ‘how do judges, how do lawyers, how do juries see victims if it goes that far?’

When it came to coverage of trials, Emily suggested that media coverage ‘can be really good but depending on who is writing the piece, it can also be really damaging’, saying there will

always be someone twisting it. Kate meanwhile felt that language was important and disliked the use of 'alleged' when describing victims, something which Tess agreed with. Whilst Tess accepted that saying 'alleged' was to do with the legalities of reporting, she told me 'that really, really got to me', because she knew what had happened to her, and how long it took her to come to terms with her experiences. Kate, however, felt the term was loaded:

There's nothing alleged, it's happened, and it needs to be dealt with but we treat victims like it may or may not have happened so we have to treat it like an allegation rather than an event and that makes it hard for other people to get it out their head that it may or may not have happened.

Emily also pointed to the internet's role in presentations of the criminal justice system, discussing how 'massive' some media coverage could become, adding 'if I'd taken mine to court and I wouldn't have wanted it to go viral or anything cause that would have been, you can never escape it', using the example of Brock Turner's victim's impact statement, which she released on *Buzzfeed* after the trial ended. This highlights the importance of social media, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

### 7.3.5 – Rape, Class and Race

For the participants who raised presentations of class and race, they felt that coverage used these to excuse the perpetrator, or to detract from the real issue of violence against women. For example, Bianca felt that Rochdale had become a 'race issue rather than [a] sexual violence issue', with little focus on the victims and more focus on gangs and ethnicity. Similarly, Sophie felt that people were 'happier to condemn a BAME rapist than a white rapist' in the coverage of abuse committed in Rotherham.

Sophie and Justine also raised the issue of class and race when discussing Brock Turner. For Justine, 'privilege, race and that kind of thing' were talked about a little but not enough as was needed. She also applied this to discussion of coverage of rape more broadly, saying that the lack of attention to coverage around rape and ethnic minority groups and less privileged communities is 'just abhorrent'. For Sophie, class was important in the coverage of Turner, and she recalled a piece in the *Guardian* she had read, 'around the importance of stripping

back class and intellect...and not in some way seeing the perpetrator as a victim'. Similarly, Shauna felt the reporting of the case would have been very different if Turner had not been a 'high-achieving white middle-class man'.

### 7.3.6 – Rape, Gender and Sexuality

For some of the participants, media portrayals of rape were intrinsically linked to how the media portrays gender and sexuality more broadly:

I think it's got a lot to do with stereotypes about sex and how people think people have sex, so it is to do with gender I suppose...I think that view of like rape and sexual assault is based around that as well, like you've only been raped if someone's penetrated you, you know what I mean, there's loads of different things aren't there?  
(Skye)

For Kiera, coverage of rape was 'all bound up together' with how society perceives masculinity, and suggested we need to 'problematise masculinity a little bit more and...don't make men's behaviour reducible to...their gender'. She described women as having to act as 'gatekeepers' for men who may perpetrate sexual violence, alongside the 'boys will be boys attitude'. This, Kiera felt, needs to change before we can achieve sensitive reporting on rape.

Bianca meanwhile discussed views on dating apps, specifically Tinder, and experiences her friends had had where the person they went on a date with had 'some weird entitlement about having sex with them', as well as the media reporting on dating apps as 'shaming' those who use them to meet others for relationships, fuelling the idea of such apps being designed solely for casual sex, and therefore an sense of entitlement to sex men on those apps may have.

Skye also discussed sex between people on nights out, starting with the example of Ched Evans, and started to wonder how this linked to sexual violence more broadly:

Ched Evans, she was drunk, they had sex, she...didn't consent but people were like 'oh but people do that all the time after a night out, that's just what people do, and you wake up and...you think oh God, I can't believe I slept with that person' and they sort of equate it to the same thing, don't they...see I'm thinking about something, is it because men are the ones that generally perpetrate sexual assaults that they don't feel like that after, you know a man's not going to wake up and think 'Oh God, did I rape that person, I'd better go to the police' (laughs)...So no wonder more women do feel like that, does that make sense? But people just think 'oh that's just because women are slags' or whatever, do you know what I mean?

Skye was beginning to unravel here how we and the media talk about casual sex after drinking, and why more women are victims of rape than men – as men do not think of these encounters as potentially being non-consensual.

### 7.3.7 - Of Other Issues

Some of the participants pointed to media coverage of other issues, such as mental health. This was raised by Skye who recalled coverage that she felt had been particularly negative and increasing stigma around mental health, even when outlets were trying to be more sensitive. Julia also commented on the guidelines for reporting of suicide when stating a need for guidelines for covering sexual violence, although she acknowledged that these are not followed.

Most significantly, however, was an issue that Naomi raised around coverage of teenage mothers in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Naomi was raped by her then-husband, and married and had children with him as a teenager, and felt the media played a role in this, saying 'I knew that media, my perception of teenage mothers motivated me to stay with an abusive partner', and that this was part of the victim-blaming she had experienced, as her experiences were not otherwise reflected in the media. She identified her motivation to stay with her ex-husband as being driven by messages she saw about teenage mothers in the media, whilst also feeling unable to attend teenage mother support groups because she felt excluded from these as she was not single. For Naomi, this was a huge part of the victim-

blaming she had experienced from the media, and it highlights the issue of reporting on sexual violence going beyond specific cases in the criminal justice system and impacting on reporting of many other issues.

#### **7.4 - Coverage Of Ched Evans' Retrial**

One portion of the interview schedule focused on the coverage of Ched Evans' retrial for rape, although some participants raised this earlier without prompting. Of the fifteen women interviewed for this phase of the research, 5 (Emily, Jessica, Justine, Rosie and Tess) had either not heard of the case or had not engaged much with media coverage of it at the time. In this instance, either an overview of the case was offered and then discussed, or, if the participant had mentioned another high-profile case (such as Adam Johnson or Brock Turner, which will be discussed later in the chapter), they were asked instead about coverage of this case.

When asked if they remembered much about the case, some of the participants, like the supporters, had strong reactions:

Vividly. Yeah. (laughs) Yeah. (Julia)

Oh god, yes, I can. Yep. I try not to think about but yeah, definitely. (Sophie)

When discussing the nature of the coverage, Bianca said that she had hoped it would be 'handled much more responsibly, but they started that kind of click bait journalism', commenting that she saw this even in the outlets she would normally expect better from, such as the BBC. Participants were asked if there was any good coverage of the case that they remembered as standing out to them:

Um, very little. (Kiera)

No! (laughs) No. I just remember it all being awful. (Ruth)

When participants could identify more positive coverage of the case, this was either online:

I think the only, the only coverage that I'd seen that was maybe trying to challenge the mainstream media view was on a few blogs and things. (Skye)

Or written as opinion pieces, which Julia identified as being a problem in and of itself:

To my memory there was pretty good [coverage] but again it's written by random independent people...it's very much opinion pieces [rather] than front page news which is strange...I think that that's a problem because it does make it seem very much like 'victim-blaming is bad' is an opinion, rather than something we should all agree [on].

Naomi also discussed feeling desensitised to the coverage, saying that it felt like this case was 'part of an entire, entire system that I'm just so used to now, I'm just so desensitised, I guess'. She also stated that the fact that Evans eventually was found to be not guilty 'horrified' her; it had felt like 'they don't get to win all the time' when he was first convicted, but the retrial left her feeling that 'Oh no, they do, they still do [win]'. Similarly, Skye mentioned that the case was one which 'really stuck in my mind', saying that she felt that coverage of the case 'was literally everywhere', including people posting articles and opinions on social media. The retrial was also concerning for her and she reflected on this and her feelings about reporting her own experience:

I suppose the fact that they could go back and do the retrial and for him to go back to another like however much money they earn, millions of pounds, that makes you think...well does in the eyes of society and the law and all this kind of stuff has he not done something wrong? But then maybe, you know you hear about people putting in like plea bargains and stuff and actually the law doesn't reflect what's right and wrong does it, so it's like oh, the law might not protect me. I've thought about should I ever report what had happened to me, but it was when I was sixteen, I'm 32 now...so it's like, it was between me and one other person in a room but even with her [in the Evans case], like there was another guy there wasn't there? So you just think what does it take to get someone to be believed? Do you have to have a full room of witnesses? (Skye)

Ruth, who said she followed the case quite closely, described it as having ‘really riled me up’, highlighting the emotional impact of the case.

For Shauna, the case was particularly difficult for her, as it was similar to her own experiences, and she found herself particularly attached to the woman in the case:

That case is quite similar to what happened to me and also because I went through, I reported it and he got, he was convicted and then I also went through an appeal process um which I found very difficult and very isolating, and the Ched Evans case was the only other time I’ve come across any individual who had gone through an appeal so I think I sort of latched on to the story a bit and then was like really, really gutted when he had the conviction quashed, which is not what happened in my case but still I was quite attached to the individual, the girl that was attacked then.

She said that at times the coverage had:

[it] made me so upset that I just couldn’t, I couldn’t go and meet my friends that night, go on with like that plans that I had because it really, really touched a nerve.

The use of the woman’s sexual history as evidence was ‘particularly difficult’ for her, as there was a time in her own case when she was interrogated on her sexual history. Shauna also told me that seeing the appeal process ‘hit me really, really hard’, and seeing coverage in the media particularly around Evans’ case ‘sometimes...just reopens that door that I’ve worked quite hard to close’. During the appeal process in her own case, Shauna shared that she had been in ‘a bad cycle of self-harm’, and that the coverage around Evans’ appeal and subsequent retrial ‘made me feel very panicked and made me think about self-harming again’. This case was therefore particularly pertinent to Shauna and her own experiences, and she identified coverage as having had a significant impact on her, saying ‘I found it, the whole [case], quite triggering’.

Other participants also discussed the way that the woman in the case was presented, including the focus on her sexual history. For example, Bianca remembered comments about the woman being a gold digger, or having tempted Evans, whilst Naomi recalled her being

described as drunk, and reporting with the aim of receiving attention from the media during the case. She also stated that the woman was described as being young, but that 'they didn't seem to see her youth as being a vulnerability', but rather as making her 'sexually provocative'. This was echoed by Kiera, who felt that the woman's sexual history was used by the media to 'legitimise her treatment' and ultimately portray her as not being a victim. Skye felt similarly, describing some of the language used in the media (particularly the *Daily Mail*) as 'pornographic', with the woman 'sexualised but in a negative way'.

Kiera also expressed concerns about the use of the woman's sexual history, and how this made her worried for herself, her friends or for any woman who might report:

I think the thing about the sexual history really and just knowing that if anything were to happen to me or any of my friends or any woman, really, that that could be the difference between her getting justice...or not...just her experience was so horrendous I think it's probably put a lot of women off reporting rape really.

Similarly, Ruth described the case as feeling like 'an attack on our freedoms and our rights' and had worries about the use of sexual history in this case setting a precedent for future cases.

The women also described the treatment the woman in the case faced through the media, with Ruth describing her as being 'hounded'. She went on to argue that there was 'nothing okay about [the] entire situation', with the woman being victimised for 'having the temerity to go out and have a laugh and get pissed...we're all allowed to do that'. Similarly, Sophie described the idea of the woman being after fame as 'really odd', whilst Kate felt that, because of the coverage of the case, 'she'll always be known as the girl that cried rape. And ruined his life'.

For Kate, she felt that 'the coverage and the way it was reported ultimately got him off', because members of the jury were 'bound to read previous things' from the first trial or on social media. Similarly, Naomi also recalled being 'really shocked' when she looked at the case

in more detail, because the facts differed greatly from the presentation of the woman she had seen in the media:

I was really shocked actually when I found the facts because the way it had been reported that she had deliberately gone to the police to get money and fame out of this and it was like totally like the opposite way round, she hadn't even known she'd been raped and she was put through all this almost by the police saying right 'we have to take this forward', it wasn't even- it was totally out of her control, and I think that was one of the shocking things about it, definitely, was how she was perceived as this money grabbing, attention seeker who and you know that wasn't what actually happened at all.

The presentation of Evans himself was also important to many of the woman interviewed. Rosie, who had seen some coverage but not engaged with it as much as others, said that even how the case was referred to ended up being sympathetic to Evans:

Especially because it's the Ched Evans case. It's like known by his name, it's very much about him, it's about like what an injustice it was or how he should be able to move on with his life.

Others also felt that Evans was presented as being the victim in the case, with Sophie commenting this was built around him losing his job, and that even after he was found guilty at the first trial, 'there was the notion...he shouldn't have to be vilified for it'. Sophie also felt that, ultimately, he became 'a hero, a stronger celebrity through it' and that his voice was more important than the woman's in the case. Julia echoed this, commenting on the media discussing 'how nice a guy he was...and for some reason [that] is more worth reporting than what he did'. Kate described Evans as being 'quite clever really...he's got away with it and made himself look like the victim'.

Some of the women drew upon Evans' status as a footballer in aiding this presentation of him. Naomi felt that this status, coupled with Evans' whiteness and living 'in a country where footballers [are] given a free pass' contributed to this. Similarly, Kate felt that the woman in the case was 'straight away...in the wrong' because Evans' status as a footballer meant that

people could not be balanced in their view of the case, and Bianca remembered coverage discussing how upset and outraged his fans were. Ruth expressed being 'sort of glad' that Evans faced consequences in his professional life, speaking of the responsibility that footballers hold in the public eye. This suggests that instead of Evans being, as Naomi stated, 'given a free pass', Evans should have instead been held to higher standards because of the responsibility of his role in the public eye and on his football team. As Skye summed this up, 'it's different when someone's like a high-profile person and working in a job, it's not like us having a job, is it?'

The coverage of Evans' rape retrial was clearly significant for those in the sample who had heard of and knew the case. However, it was not the only high-profile case to be raised in the interviews, and these will be discussed next.

## **7.5 - Other High-Profile Cases**

### **7.5.1 - Adam Johnson**

Another case raised throughout the interviews was that of Adam Johnson, a fellow footballer who, at the time of his arrest, was playing for Sunderland A.F.C., in North East England. Johnson is currently serving a six-year sentence for grooming and sexual activity with a child, after pleading guilty to two offences, and being found guilty of another (Osbourne, 2016). His victim was fifteen at the time, and, in her victim impact statement, described the abuse that she, like the woman in Evans' case, had suffered on social media as a result of the trial (Osbourne, 2016).

Kate described some of the abuse she had seen on social media surrounding the case, including in the comment sections on Facebook posts from a local newspaper:

Stories like the Adam Johnson thing it was all about how she looked older, she shouldn't have been in the nightclub, she knew what she was doing, she saw a footballer, she wanted his money. Not many people actually come out and said you

know what, he knew she was fifteen, he had a family at home and he took advantage, they were grooming, you know it's such a strong word, but people were happy to think she led him on.

Similarly, Rosie mentioned the death threats and the doxing (sharing of her identifiable information, such as name and address, online) that the girl had been subjected to. Skye also made reference to the campaign launched by Johnson's sister on social media proclaiming his innocence.

The abuse suffered on social media by the woman and girl in the cases was not the only similarity between them, and the women who discussed Adam Johnson's trial in the interviews talked about how the victim was portrayed. Despite the victim being underage, and therefore legally unable to consent, Rosie recalled headlines calling her 'a slut and a whore and she deserves everything she gets'. Similarly, Tess felt that media coverage seemed 'to forget that the law states no person, no woman under the age of 16 can consent' and questioned how the media could portray her as consenting. Bianca described the use of photographs from the girl's Instagram page, showing her 'looking made up...and wearing tight dresses', and journalists using these, 'fuelling the culture that this child is somehow responsible'. Tess also expressed concern about the detail that was reported in the media following the court case, saying 'there was quite graphic details of what the actual scenario and the steps that led up to the abuse, some of the text messages and things like that'. She said that when her own case went to court, she was told her name was not allowed to be used outside of the court room, and that she was led to believe the details of the case were confidential as well, so the coverage of Johnson's trial conflicted strongly with this.

Like Evans, reference was also made to Johnson's status as a footballer, with Kate feeling that Johnson was protected from being blamed for the abuse he committed, especially by his financial status:

I think if it was a normal homeless guy on the street was befriending a fifteen-year-old the public would be up in arms about this dirty old man on the street but because he had money straight away it was her fault, because she wanted his money, you know.

This protection then allowed the blame to be deflected straight onto the victim, despite her age and legal incapacity to consent.

Tess, who lived near the city Johnson was playing for at the time of his arrest, described the impact of seeing the case on both the national and local news, describing it as 'an overload'. She stated that it made her 'angry because the local people don't need to see it twice' and described the 'notoriety' Johnson would build with all the coverage.

### 7.5.2 - Brock Turner

Brock Turner's trial for rape was also raised in the interviews. At the time of his arrest, Turner was a nineteen-year-old student at Stanford University. Like Evans and Johnson, Turner was athletic, and was attending Stanford on a swimming scholarship. Turner was arrested in January 2015, after being found assaulting an unconscious woman by two male passers-by. He was sentenced to six months in jail, which itself was subject to criticism (with the judge who sentenced Turner being later recalled by voters), and served half of this (Lopez, 2018). The victim released her victim impact statement on *Buzzfeed*, receiving over eleven million views in four days (Dastagir, 2017).

Bianca recalled the coverage as being 'very sensationalised', with the two passers-by who intervened described as heroes, a sentiment echoed by Justine. As well as this, she talked about the articles published discussing campus culture, and what this meant for her:

There was still loads of kind of the background of these like think pieces of people being like 'oh college students drink too much' and 'college students have a like promiscuous culture on their campuses' and blah blah blah and all of these really incorrect trains of thought that completely miss the point that this guy committed a horrible violent crime against another student and it's like, it essentially begged the question for me of what would it take, what kind of awful violent rape would it take for people not to jump to the how can we pin this on the victim.

Emily also reflected on the polarising views found in the coverage:

It was quite mixed cause...the bad ones that were saying 'oh we don't want to ruin his future and he's a really good kid' and all that stuff...And then obviously there was the one that was saying 'he did this, he should get sentenced, he should get more' which is absolutely right, em so it's quite mixed, but it was just a mess really cause then obviously every time an article came out where people say he should get more time, all the people who were thinking oh he's okay, he's a good lad, just like proper piled in on them.

However, Sophie reflected on what she described as a 'strong piece of writing' published in the *Guardian* during Turner's case, which discussed victim-blaming, and not viewing perpetrators as having been victimised by the crime. She felt it 'really portrayed the horror of the crime and the reality of the situation'. Sophie also described this article as 'stripping back' intellect, and not allowing a perpetrator's perceived intellect to be used to defend them. However, Justine felt that coverage was lacking in its discussion around race, and the privilege afforded to Turner due to his identity as a middle-class white man.

Privilege was also afforded to Turner due to his athleticism, which was discussed in the media coverage of the case, and this was picked up on by Emily, who remembered descriptions of him as a 'star athlete', whose future was at risk because the rape:

They were like trying to blame her and it's just *no way* that was her fault but then cause he was like a star athlete or something, he just got the 'okay we don't want to ruin your future, but you've just ruined her life but that's fine'.

Again, like Evans and Johnson, Turner's status as an athlete was seen to offer him a unique position as a victim of his own behaviours, and as a justification for him to be found not guilty, or, when he was found guilty, to receive a lenient sentence.

Justine, who had lived in America before moving to the UK, described the coverage around Turner as a 'phenomenon more than anything else', stating that it was at a fine tipping point

of becoming 'a bit circus-y'. However, this was a comment more on the news cycle in the US, and she felt the victim was brave for sharing her statement, and that it was well received by people who would normally not pay attention to sexual violence. Overall, Justine described herself as 'pleased with the general attention it got' and appreciated that it provoked discussion.

### 7.5.3 – Other Perpetrators

As well as discussion around Evans, Johnson, and Turner, Bianca also referenced another athlete, Spanish footballer David de Gea. De Gea, who plays for Manchester United, was named in documents from a protected witness in another court case. De Gea was linked in the documents to an underage prostitution ring, but no further action was taken against him (Couzens, 2018).

Bianca commented that coverage focused on the damage to de Gea's career, and the Spanish team's chances in the upcoming Euros, commenting that it was:

All that really terrifying kind of completely missing the point discussions of like what it was going to do his career, and no-one was talking about the fact that there were potentially two traumatised child victims, and who gives a fuck if David de Gea misses one big football thing?

Here we can clearly see the focus of media discourse being on the potential perpetrator's sports career over concerns around victims, and this mirrors what was found in the media analysis conducted in this research.

Tess discussed Jimmy Savile, and how much coverage there was around him, and described it as being 'horrific. Absolutely horrific'. She added that it was bad enough hearing his name, but that the use of his photo in reports was unnecessary, which she had taken action regarding:

I wrote to the BBC and I said 'look, you've got to stop putting the pictures of these people up, every time a victim sees that picture, she's going to go through it again', and they wrote back and they said they had a duty to report it in the media.

Despite therefore challenging the media and pointing out the damage they were doing in showing photos of Savile and the others investigated as part of Operation Yewtree, the BBC ignored Tess, and she described herself as feeling angry and 'very powerless to actually be heard' against the BBC. For her, the photos and videos of perpetrators used in coverage showed them as 'wonderful people' (such as Savile and footage of him at charity events), and seeing it meant 'you're taken back to when that wonderful person did that [abuse] to you'. As well as this, she suggested that others in the footage would not want to be associated with the perpetrator. However, the BBC did eventually change their practice on using photos and video, as Tess continued to say

Then a couple of months later, I saw it on this particular programme that I'd tried to get through to...someone else had actually written in and said exactly the same thing and they said they were going to act on it.

signalling that collective action and campaigning against the media can be effective in creating change.

Actors were also discussed by some of the participants, and Bianca commented on how coverage around sexual abuse committed by Cosby and domestic violence by Johnny Depp had affected her:

The idea that...because someone's your favourite actor or you really like their music that they couldn't possibly be guilty of such a horrendous, heinous act and that was like a ridiculous realisation for me that people would rather be in denial about a situation than have to accept the fact that...you don't personally know your favourite actor, they may in fact be a bad person...you'll find every single way to believe anything other than this may in fact have some truth to it.

Sophie also referenced Johnny Depp, and echoed the comments made by Bianca, saying that people did not want to believe not only celebrities, but that the abuse could be committed,

and felt that some of the victim-blaming around this is from ‘almost an innocent rather than necessarily a terrible place’.

Sophie also mentioned the case of Doug Richard, who appeared on the BBC show *Dragon’s Den*, and she felt the media coverage overall portrayed the victims negatively. Then 57 years old, Richard used a ‘sugar daddy’ website to talk to, receive photographs from and meet up and have sex with a thirteen-year-old girl (Evans, 2016). He was found not guilty, as the girl told him she was over sixteen, although they had discussed meeting after school (Evans, 2016). He paid for the girl and a fifteen-year-old friend’s train tickets to London and booked accommodation for them, as well as ‘gifting’ them cash to go shopping after meeting them (Evans, 2016). The girls were portrayed in the media, according to Sophie, as ‘working class in a very negative way, not very clever, manipulative’, knowing what they were doing and as planning to ‘trap’ Richard in order to get money from him. However, Sophie remembered reading the girls’ testimony closely, and felt it was clear the girls had a ‘naïve version of what a sugar daddy was...and they had no guardian or parental support’. As Tess referred to when discussing Adam Johnson’s victim, Sophie’s account of the media in this case seems to forget the age of consent, and the age and power imbalances between the two teenage girls and the millionaire former government advisor.

#### 7.5.4 - Weinstein and #MeToo

Towards the final interviews, the allegations around American film producer Harvey Weinstein had begun to come to light, and the #MeToo campaign was in its early days. Therefore, whilst the true scale of the movement was not yet known, Weinstein and #MeToo was referenced in three of the interviews (although only two talked about it in detail) as case that was emerging and ongoing.

Julia described the #MeToo as interesting, ‘albeit a little triggering’. She felt that a lot of coverage of the women coming forward about Weinstein was focused on asking questions such as:

‘Why didn’t they say it earlier’, or ‘are they just looking for some money?’ or you know ‘they’re not attractive enough to have been harassed or assaulted by somebody’ or ‘he’s rich enough he could just pay people, why would he assault someone?’

She also pointed out that women were participating in this narrative, using the example of *The Big Bang Theory* actress Mayim Bialik’s opinion piece in the *New York Times*, where she discussed dressing modestly as ‘self-protecting and wise’ (Bialik, 2017). Julia described this itself as victim-blaming, as ‘that made people who’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted feel very self-conscious about that they were wearing...whether or not they were inviting it’.

Skye described an interaction with her friend talking about Weinstein:

He was saying ‘Oh, I think a lot of the women they just...had some kind of sexual contact with him and then they sort of felt bad cause they thought oh he’s really disgusting and they just kind of felt a bit remorseful so now they’re telling people they were assaulted’.

This left Skye feeling ‘sort of sick feeling’, and unable to challenge him on it, as well as it being ‘exhausting...why should I have to challenge people all the time and argue, I don’t want to have to think about it all the time’. As well as this, coverage of Weinstein had made Skye realise she had maybe trivialised things that had happened to her, and how it could be so ‘pandemic’, saying ‘people seem so shocked but I don’t find it shocking’.

## **7.6 - Different Forms of Media**

Whilst the research is mostly focused on news media, other forms of media were discussed throughout the interviews, including fictional forms of media, and social media.

### 7.6.1 - News Media

Much of the interview conversation around news media revolved around the high-profile perpetrators and cases, so was therefore discussed above. However, there were some more general comments about news media, which will be explored here.

Some participants pointed to the nature of coverage:

It needs to really think about what it's reporting and *how* it's reporting it, yes I quite agree it needs to be reported because how else are you going to find the other victims, but there's a way of doing it that is sensitive. (Tess)

The media is very, at the end of the day, completely irresponsible in the way that they handle it. I'm not really one that believes in journalistic integrity, but...some of the ways that people are mistreated by journalists, especially if they have been a victim of rape. (Bianca)

Justine, who had lived in the United States, Canada and now Northern Ireland, felt that there was a difference between these countries in how they reported sexual violence:

Canada was probably the most on in terms of how they talked about rape or sexual assaults, um and they, their media there was, to me, was much more intuned to it and sensitive to it, and it was a bit more, I don't know, it was a bit more thoughtful in how they went about it, whereas the US it's like 'argh!' It's this like craziness, and like I said, it's like this obsession for like a week and then it kind of goes away...in Canada, there was a bit, there was a lot of attention to First Nations and what Native women's experiences were...in the US, like when it's talked about it's almost exclusively campus situations and overwhelmingly white women at campuses. In the UK, and I guess I've been surprised at how much I don't hear about it as much here...if it's talked about here, it's often in terms of domestic violence than other forms of sexual violence...I mean just the abject insensitivity to it is just jaw dropping.

Others also discussed a lack of inclusion of support information in news articles:

You don't seem to have people saying 'oh, you know, if you've been affected by these issues, you can come and talk to us', you do get that with other mental health, you know with suicide and stuff, maybe not so much with rape and sexual assault...the *Guardian* and stuff they try to provide lots of information, but then, I don't know, they always sort of put it at the end as well, rather than at the beginning, like 'you're going to be reading about this', not everyone will make it to the end of the article. (Skye)

I mean those little disclaimers they should put 'oh if you're someone who's been a victim of whatever', they do on some issues but not with others. (Bianca)

Similarly, when it came to comments from Rape Crisis, or other specialist women's organisations:

[Specialist women's organisations] they're really good at when they see, when they're being asked to comment on cases, they're really good at ensuring that the right message is put forward...but I think in certainly in newspaper articles and journalism, it does mean that they're kind of really tucked at the bottom of the article comment, and it's never the lead message, so I definitely see it and of course I appreciate it, but it always feels, yeah, tucked away. (Sophie)

When discussing the mainstream media coverage of sexual violence, Justine described it as 'not always the best', but that independent media was often better, or held more choice. This leads into what participants felt the differences were between mainstream media and online media coverage.

#### 7.6.2 - Online Versus Mainstream Media

Jessica described mainstream media as 'lagging behind' more online-based forms of media, something echoed in Julia's comments:

I've seen a lot of stuff, for example *Everyday Feminism*, which isn't a written publication, it's online and that is fab...*Evening Standard*, *Daily Mail*, all that sort of stuff, not a peep out of them (laughs) so it is very much independent writers who do things online and get shared you know, onto your Twitter feed.

Justine meanwhile expressed disappointment that there was such a difference between online and mainstream media:

Independent media, great it's out there, great, but I think yeah, I mean to me, it would be really great to not have it be so much of a dichotomy between independent and mass media on some of this.

She also felt that Brock Turner's case was one which 'bridged' the independent and mass media, as 'it was something everyone knew about to some kind of degree'.

Skye also felt that online posts may challenge victim-blaming but could also 'go like really far the other way', and described the 'polarised' views found in blogs, which she did not like.

### 7.6.3 - Social Media

As can be seen in the comments above about online forms of news media, this is often strongly linked to social media. For example, Julia described the internet as a 'great thing and an awful thing', as it facilitated victim-blaming, but, conversely, also provided people with spaces to form networks and support groups. Emily also felt this way, naming particular groups on social media that she engaged with, and had been beneficial for supporting her and other victim-survivors.

Kate discussed the overlap between social media and news media, regarding comments on a local paper's Facebook page:

I often read the *Chronicle* online on Facebook, and you read stories and the public'll comment on things, and then the *Chronicle* will reply, but they never do on subjects like rape or child abuse, they never reply and challenge, and I would like to see that more, I would like a writer to put a thing out there and when the negativity starts or the victim-blaming starts, I would like somebody from that paper to challenge.

Naomi felt that social media offered an 'amazing opportunity' for individuals to challenge victim-blaming as a 'critical mass', which would then lead to mainstream media coverage, but

recognised that this was available to her because of her own, particularly feminist, spaces on social media:

I think there's definitely, I definitely see more and more, particularly being on feminist Twitter and being, existing in those spaces mean that I guess I see a lot, but if I was to think about my sister, who is on Facebook and is on non-feminist Facebook...I don't think that makes it into her consciousness.

Naomi is raising a key issue with social media, and one that the supporter interviews also raised: that of the 'bubble' of social media.

#### 7.6.4 – Fictional Media

Fictional forms of media were also mentioned by some of the women interviewed. Rosie described some episodes that had particularly affected her (and the consequences will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter). She began by saying that much of her friends' understanding of rape and sexual violence 'were very much based on what was on TV', and went on to offer examples from both *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory*, where sexual violence was not identified as such:

*Friends* was a big one...there was a whole thing where he married Rachel when she was too drunk to consent and then refused to unmarry her, and that was all very tied up in myths around sexual assault...I mean there was a whole thing about trying to learn kung-fu to scare the women in his life, cause women don't spend enough of their lives scared...*The Big Bang Theory* was also...I distinctly remember...where the whole joke, the whole episode is 'Penny got raped, Penny got raped last night, isn't this hysterical!'...and a lot of the way that that was spoke about was very much in terms of 'Oh my God, my best friend had sex with my ex-girlfriend', and not 'Oh my God, you did what to somebody who was too drunk to consent?'

For the episode of *The Big Bang Theory*, Rosie recalled watching this with a room full of other people who were laughing, and described this as 'really, really, really horrible, and very 'oh dear, something terrible could happen here'.

Bianca referred to a 'glamourised American TV idea' of sexual violence and talked about *13 Reasons Why* showing victim-survivors as suffering from mental health problems, and as 'this weird like damaged damsel who feels impure...and has to off herself'. She described this as 'the only character [rape victims] are allowed to be' on television.

As well as this, Bianca discussed how sexualised or romanticised rape was in fictional media:

I also think there's that weird fetishized aspect of rape victims as well...I know a lot of the like scenes that I've ever seen on TV and stuff, very inappropriately portray the reality of the traumatic situation that rape can be...I remember, the one on *Game of Thrones*...essentially they made the rape scene look like it was meant to be quite romantic...they don't realise how damaging it can be because it like portrays this whole other side of sexual assault that shouldn't be there, the glamorisation, the romanticisation.

And in the film *50 Shades of Gray*:

It's adding fuel to this kind of like, firstly people taking rape less seriously and people not understanding what rape looks like, because to them now, it's reinforcing this idea that actual rape is some dodgy alleyway with a guy with a knife or whatever, and this is just like, hot, like dodgy sex...instead it turned into this like kind of fetishized exploration of whether or not consent is necessary and of course, it's fine because they're both attractive.

Kiera also felt that films 'perpetuate this idea of what rape really is, um, rather than you know the fact that it happens mostly in relationships', furthering the idea that if you are raped in a relationship or by a friend, you should not report as it is not 'real rape'.

Others mentioned TV dramas, including *Liar*, discussed earlier in the chapter when looking at presentations of the criminal justice system, and *Three Girls*, a dramatization of abuse committed against teenage girls in Rochdale, and which was raised in the supporter interviews. Skye, for example, discussed *Three Girls*, saying 'the whole idea that these girls

were viewed as promiscuous' without recognising they were being abused. She told me about a friend of hers who is a social worker and who, like Social Services in *Three Girls*, did not recognise pregnant teenage girls as also needing help, instead focusing on the welfare of the baby. With *Liar*, as discussed earlier in the chapter, Jessica questioned how helpful the title of the show itself was. This was something Kate also raised when she discussed the showing of the forensic exam shown, commenting:

I thought 'I hope people are watching the process and know how hard that is, because it's like it happens to you all over again, you're there, you're vulnerable...but again, the whole concept of *Liar* takes away the good that they did show...the title's called *Liar*.

This portrayal prompted a mixed feeling:

Researcher: Do you think it was good that *Liar* did show the forensic exam bit?

Kate: Yes and no...Yes that it shows what people go through, and that unless you're mentally insane, you're not going to put yourself through that but at the same time I did worry that it would put people off because it is quite a cold process...so I was pleased they showed it on that programme but in another way I think it might make things difficult.

This highlights the contention between accurate representations of sexual violence and the criminal justice system, and how these representations may affect the number of victim-survivors who report to the police.

Content warnings also came up when discussing fictional media. For example, Rosie told me that she 'super appreciate[s] having warnings about like rape is coming up'. For her, it enabled her to be 'able to prepare for it', and this being able to either be prepared for a show or film showing sexual violence, or being able to choose not to watch it (but potentially watch it at another time), was valuable for her.

The key issues raised by participants in the discussion of fictional accounts of sexual violence is that they rely on stereotypes or are inaccurate, and that they may affect women choosing to report.

## **7.7 - Challenging Victim-blaming**

The interviews asked about participants' experiences around challenging victim-blaming, including of seeing it being done and doing it themselves.

### **7.7.1 - Media**

Participants were asked if they had seen victim-blaming be challenged in the media, such as by journalists, and, for some, this was a simple answer:

Not that I'm aware of, no. (Natasha)

Um, no (laughs) is the short answer. (Rosie)

No. Because I think the media write the story that'll get the interest of the reader, I think they don't really think about the victim sitting reading it, so like I said before, I've never seen an article written that the writer's kind of challenge[d]. (Kate)

No. I think, the media just see a story and they'll go for it, and they don't think about [the] consequence of what that will have on other people. (Tess)

For others, they were often only able to identify this challenging being done either in non-mainstream media, or by specific journalists in mainstream publications:

I think columnists like Jessica Valenti, Hadley Freeman, people like that do quite often call it out um but it yeah, it's a long process, I think. (Shauna)

I mean the things that spring to my mind is I suppose reading some of the more kind of feminist style of publications, you know, maybe on Twitter. (Jessica)

Not the sort of mainstream stuff, um, blogs and online think pieces and that sort of article, yeah, definitely, um, but it's mostly independent writers rather than people going through major news sources. (Julia)

Naming publications for challenging victim-blaming was rare:

Yeah definitely, there's a few journalists that I follow mainly on Twitter and things like that...there's a lot of sensitive reporting I think in the *Independent*...I think even the *Sun* did a turnaround on the Ched Evans case you know for the end, but yeah their reporting's very hit or miss, and it's mainly like the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, the *Mirror*, things like that, very much, they tend to side with victim-blaming a lot more than the independent and left-wing sort of papers. (Kiera)

Whilst, for Justine, she felt that a positive for the media now was the 'almost instantaneous pushback' to victim-blaming pieces, and how online media and social media offered a platform for this.

#### 7.7.2 - Rape Crisis and Specialist Women's Organisations

Participants were also asked if they had seen women's organisations, such as Rape Crisis, challenging victim-blaming in the media:

I've seen quite a lot of stuff done by smaller charities, but it doesn't necessarily have so much of a reach...Rape Crisis, the work they do is absolutely fantastic, it's brilliant but they don't necessarily have the reach to get to every single person, it's more the people who are already interested in the work they do who see it, and also because a lot of the groups trying to do really good things are charities, they're financially restricted, so getting on a really, really massive, wider scale is difficult. (Julia)

Some of the other like sexual health charities and things like that I follow definitely [have] stood up to people being victim-blamed. (Kiera)

I have, but it's one of those things where they have so much less traction and so much less voice. (Rosie)

Reach is clearly seen as being an issue here, again echoing back to the comments of social media being a bubble.

For Tess and Kate, they, like some of the supporters, identified the strain of being in the media and supporting clients for Rape Crisis centres:

I think charities like that, they need a media profile but I also think the majority of their work is behind the scenes. (Tess)

I think Rape Crisis, they put out articles where you know, especially the Adam Johnson and the Ched Evans, they put the articles out there...but I think even on Twitter and things if they wrote a post and somebody wrote something negative, I don't know whether they would challenge it on social media, I don't know whether it's appropriate for them to do that...I suppose they're in a difficult position, aren't they...I think as an organisation they've got to address it quite delicately, don't they, but is it a charity's kind of job to do it, or should the police be doing it, the media be doing it, you know these charities need to focus on what they're doing with victims. (Kate)

Like some of the supporters felt, there is a desire here from Kate and Tess for Rape Crisis to focus on their work with victim-survivors, although they did recognise the importance of such organisations also engaging in media work.

### 7.7.3 - Personal Life

Participants were also asked about if they had challenged victim-blaming in their own lives, and responses were more mixed here than for the supporters:

Sometimes. (Emily)

Mostly I would say I do, yeah. (Jessica)

Although some were more positive:

Yeah (laughs) yeah, I'm...very opinionated, somewhat confrontational (laughs). (Julia)

Oh yeah, for sure. (Justine)

All the time. (Naomi)

However, Kate felt that she could not:

Nah...I don't want to put myself out there as being somebody that it happened to so no. Because I think it's putting you in a vulnerable position and on the flipside, if I was kind of casually saying over social media 'well, this happened to me, and this is how I' - then you're going to get people question whether it did actually happen to you, because you're so open and honest about it.

This risk of 'exposing' yourself as a victim-survivor was touched upon by other participants:

If you say it...you're looked at as a victim because people think that [is] the only reason you could possibly care about something...you're immediately putting a marker of having happened to me on you. (Julia)

It's one of those weird things where you don't necessarily want to *out* yourself as a victim of child sexual abuse (Rosie)

Other negative feelings were also identified, even when participants reported choosing to challenge:

It's really scary cause you don't know what you're going to be given back. (Emily)

It's super difficult, and I mean you're constantly facing this like 'well, what if I completely alienate [the] person I work with or my brother'. (Rosie)

I feel quite tense, because I feel that I'm just on the edge of them maybe being like, I don't know, disagreeing and saying something I would struggle to hear. (Shauna)

Researcher: How do you find it, doing that challenging?

Julia: Terrifying! Absolutely terrifying!

And some said that it would depend on the situation they were in as to whether or not they felt able to challenge, with Shauna saying:

In theory, I'd like to think I do...but the reality of it is, it really does depend on who is saying it and when and ultimately you have to put your own safety and stuff first.

However, for many of the women and as Naomi put it, 'the cost of not speaking out is more important than the cost of alienating people'. This was echoed by Rosie, who identified it as 'super difficult' in the quote above, but went on to say that 'I can't hear it without arguing with it', and Emily, who called it 'really scary', but 'most of the time I just feel really good, cause you know you're sticking up for someone'.

Others also identified positive feelings about engaging in this challenging, with Sophie saying that 'I think it's part of the recovery process for some'. Natasha admitted that she found it difficult, but also that 'it's good when you do challenge somebody...cause you might make them think from a different perspective'.

Naomi also discussed the role of feminism in her ability to 'critically engage with the wider discourses', but felt that her experiences of having undergone a 'feminist consciousness raising' were not the norm for most victim-survivors.

#### 7.7.4 - Changing Reporting

Participants were also asked how they felt we as victim-survivors and activists could change reporting in the media, and some of the answers here related to activism:

I suppose we have to challenge it, don't we? That's got to be the answer, and I think it has to be, it has to be a fairly organised and collective response, I suppose, without that, it just looks like a couple militant feminist kind of pissed of women. (Jessica)

Specifically with the media, I think it is about kind of keeping up the pressure, challenging media and challenging news like journalists to be responsible in their reporting, to challenge unethical reporting. (Naomi)

Or working with the media:

You need people, victims, who are willing to waive their anonymity, to go on the TV, to talk about their experiences to really shock people so they can understand the impact on those of us that have gone through this. (Tess)

I think unless the media are working directly with Rape Crisis and charities like Rape Crisis, then they're not going to understand any of the work that's done or the needs of victims, or how they are making the victims lives a bit harder. I think journalists should have to spend a day [at Rape Crisis] before they're allowed to report on anything. (Kate)

Some also suggested standards for journalists to follow, or education on the subject:

Language is really important...there should be a journalistic standards conversation about how we use certain terms and you know, trying to come up with some blanket rules about you know, not sort of, you can't specify what people say, but rather than saying 'bungalow death', you would say 'woman murdered', you know, let's use those actual words. (Ruth)

I think there needs to be more focus on the journalism standards and what informs the way that they report it...I think it should be at least guidance they could follow as the framework, even if it's just what not to say, even. (Julia)

However, as Rosie also put it:

In a lot of ways I don't think it's necessarily women's job (laughs) and I think it's one of those weird things where being raped doesn't give you a job.

Rosie highlighted that, as she put it, being a victim-survivor is not a job, and women should not have to spend more emotional labour on changing media coverage of sexual violence.

## **7.8 - Consequences of Media Coverage**

Participants were asked about the consequences media coverage had had upon them. These are grouped into the following themes: identifying sexual violence; emotional consequences; consequences on mental health; physical consequences; reporting and disclosing; and other consequences. It is worth noting that these themes are not necessarily discrete from one another. There is sometimes significant overlap between them, particularly with regards to the emotional, physical and mental health consequences identified.

### **7.8.1 - Identifying Sexual Violence**

As referred to when exploring the presentations of rape earlier in the chapter, one of the consequences participants identified was the media impacting upon being able to identify sexual violence. As discussed above, Naomi did not see her own experiences of being raped by her then-husband in the media, and, as Ruth did, she described the media as 'this wallpaper that we just spend our lives around, that influences how...we translate our experience into meaning', and therefore key in her understanding. Seeing rape committed by a stranger as the only 'real rape' in the media therefore impacted Naomi's 'ability to really own the reality of sexual violence and the reality of what had been done to me'. The

realisation that she had been subjected to rape only came when her son was born prematurely as a result:

A lot of the kind of media portrayal of loose women or whatever, that wasn't relevant particularly because I think what it meant was, all those narrative, I didn't see my experiences as real sexual violence, and it was only because of my son being born premature that I was able to start the journey of realising that I'd been subjected to four years of sexual violence.

Similarly:

It wasn't until...a lot later that I even realised that like, my own, what had happened to me, cause it happened within a relationship as well, so it was, I don't fit the stereotype, you know. (Skye)

I didn't really see it as legitimate um act of violence as such...I don't think the media reports rape in that sense. (Kiera)

Both of the women who gave the quotes above had, like Naomi, been raped within relationships. Naomi also mentioned the images used in reports, saying 'pictures in the media of women with bruised faces, and you know, cowering up against a wall...that wasn't my experience, it didn't fit me', and called them 'really problematic'.

This identifying violence also applied to other people, with victims of rape being 'othered'. Naomi, who now talks about her experiences as part of her work, told me:

I've been told that I'm too short to be abused, I'm too, um, I'm too young to be abused, I'm not ugly enough to be abused. Like I spoke at a conference recently and afterwards this woman spoke to the organisers and said 'Oh you know, I can't *believe* that she was abused because you, because she's pretty, isn't she?'...There's definitely this pervasive sense that, basically when I tell my story people are shocked that I could be somebody subjected to this stuff.

And this could be seen in some of Bianca's interactions with her friends, discussed above, where she described them as being 'doubtful' of her experiences because she did not fit within the 'damaged' image of victims seen in the media.

Linked to this barrier to identifying abuse was that media and victim-blaming made some of the women interviewed question their own experiences of sexual violence:

It's upsetting, and it makes you sort of question your own experience. (Shauna)

So like the victim-blaming had been, and obviously with everything you see in the media, it does affect you, and you start doubting yourself over and over and over. (Emily)

You know you read all of these opinions and they say 'oh, well actually she should have done this, oh and he was drunk too, and also how could either of them have known', and you sort of start to doubt yourself, you doubt what you think and you think 'God, maybe, maybe I wasn't raped'...it can spiral out of control because so many people, like the media's so accessible, isn't it? (Skye)

What is being described here is akin to 'gaslighting' but, instead of being committed on an individual level by one person to another, is being done on a mass scale, by an institution.

### 7.8.2 - Emotional Consequences

Participants also listed a range of emotional consequences they felt that the media had had on them. Of these, the most common was that it made the women angry, with eight of the participants describing this during the interviews:

Researcher: How do you find the media affecting you, and victim-blaming affecting you?

Ruth: It depends on the time of year because I think if it's nearer my anniversary, it upsets me, but actually I just tend to get angry, cause I think it's still, we're *still* here.

Researcher: Do you remember any of the coverage [of Ched Evans' retrial] that you did see having an effect on you in anyway?

Sophie: Yeah, it made me really angry!

I don't get mad that much, but I feel anger in those situations, which is not a go-to emotion usually for me, and I do feel like angry when I feel like that the coverage is...when it's actually hurting progress on this issue. (Justine)

For Emily, she felt anger on behalf of Brock Turner's victim when reading victim-blaming in the media and social media:

It was, again, it just made me really angry cause I was just like 'you have no idea what, what's, how that's going to affect her.

Something Kiera echoed when discussing Ched Evans, saying 'it just makes me angry...the Ched Evans case like really riled me up'. Similarly:

I just get annoyed. I read things and I get annoyed, because I know how things are portrayed aren't necessarily how they are, and Adam Johnson, Ched Evans, they're huge cases that bring it to a discussion point. (Kate)

This is in contention with the presentation of victims as being 'fragile' that Bianca and Sophie described earlier.

Women also described media coverage as being upsetting for them, but like above, also being upset on behalf of other victims:

It's not just upsetting and sort of re-traumatizing for the individual who's being specifically told that they were in the wrong, but also for every single other [victim].  
(Julia)

Researcher: How did it make you feel seeing [Savile's] face so much?

Tess: Um, I was upset, I was a little bit upset for me but I was hugely upset for his victims.

Shauna also described how the coverage of Ched Evans' retrial had left her feeling so upset that she had cancelled plans with friends, adding an element of social isolation. This upset was often alongside other emotions, and shame and guilt were also brought as feelings experienced as a result of media coverage:

Within the first few years, I would just be in bits if I found anything like that, just you know, it would just cause a lot of upset, and a lot of feelings of guilt and you know sort of shame, and just very mixed up...sort of responses that didn't make any sense.  
(Jessica)

Similarly, Naomi described a 'natural sense of shame' that came as a side effect of sexual violence for her, but that the media 'definitely increased the levels of shame that I felt'.

Linked to this sense of shame was the feeling of self-blame:

I don't feel like I'm to blame for what happened to me, however, when it's for other people, it can be quite to be honest, really difficult, cause obviously you start to question 'Oh, was it the way I dressed that provoked him?' (Natasha)

I think it [media reporting] absolutely can make you feel like 'Oh well, I deserved it, what *did* I expect?' (Rosie)

I think it makes me question um whether I could have done anything different.  
(Sophie)

Sophie also identified that seeing victim-blaming in the media left her feeling 'vulnerable'.

A range of negative emotions have therefore been identified by the women who took part in these interviews, and these are linked quite closely with the consequences identified on mental health, which will be examined next.

### 7.8.3 - Mental Health

One of the issues raised was that the media could be triggering for victim-survivors. Shauna for example, described the use of sexual history evidence in the Evans retrial as 'quite triggering', as it correlated with her own experiences in court. For Sophie, media coverage could mean that she 'bounce[s] straight back to having to do a lot of the self-care stuff' and that it can feel like a 'massive trigger to push me back into the very early stages of victim again'. Natasha said that the media was 'always triggering' for her in terms of triggering flashbacks, and that it makes her think about what happened to her when rape is 'constantly brought up in the media'. Similarly, Julia described media coverage as having led to panic attacks:

A couple of times, (coughs) *Daily Mail*, it's given me pretty intense panic attacks, cause it makes me think back over it, about what I personally could have done differently.

Whilst, for Shauna, coverage around Evans had made her feel 'very panicked'.

Some participants also discussed media affecting their PTSD, with Julia describing negative coverage as increasing 'victim-blaming and PTSD'. Rosie gave a specific example about her husband triggering a dissociative episode which formed part of her PTSD when discussing a fictional story he had read:

I'm like, instantly just completely like everything feels like I can't remember where my limbs...are...it took me probably like an hour to come back to feeling like I could move my hands and know where my face was, but I say I felt so much like, sort of like being underwater.

Sophie described the consequence that coverage had had on her mental health, including affecting her self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as impacting on 'whether I over eat or under eat', and that she became 'very aware of having to put my professional persona back on'. Tess felt that 'any negative attitude towards the victim in the media, I think, has a detrimental effect on mental well-being'.

Shauna, whose own case had been through a court case then an appeal (discussed in more detail in the section on Ched Evans above), told me she had 'got into a bad cycle of self-harm' during the appeal in her case, and the coverage of Evans' retrial 'made me think about self-harming again'.

#### 7.8.4 - Physical Consequences

There were also a range of physical consequences and sensations that participants listed, such as Jessica describing seeing anything that was related to her own experiences as 'a bit of a punch in the stomach', and Justine saying 'that's such a physical thing that you feel in that moment'. Similarly, Natasha described TV programmes as sometimes 'churn[ing] my stomach' and feeling 'sick' when hearing the word rape. Sophie shared that it had led to her having nightmares. Skye, when describing an interaction with a friend following the coverage of Weinstein (discussed in more detail above) recounted the 'adrenaline rush...that pang and that ugh, sort of sick feeling'.

Rosie also detailed some of the physical feelings she has experienced, particularly whilst watching specific films and TV shows. The media itself will be discussed later, but the effects she felt will be detailed here:

I distinctly remember feeling this horrible like tight feeling in my chest and feeling like, 'I think I'm going to be sick'...everything in my body feels horrible and I [want] to throw up.

This also overlapped with her PTSD:

I had pretty bad PTSD for a number of years, and I used to have horrible dissociative spells...a lot of it felt very physical and dizzy, nauseous, hot like hot and cold, and feel very like cornered.

Similarly, Rosie recalled a particularly graphic headline that left her feeling 'very unwell', and a film that made her feel 'sweaty and constricted, and I want to get up and run away'.

Some of these sensations described by participants are linked closely with mental health, such as the feelings Rosie described as part of her PTSD, but this highlights a range of physical consequences that the media can trigger for victim-survivors.

#### 7.8.5 - Reporting and Disclosing

Those interviewed also identified that the media had either affected their decisions around reporting or disclosing their experiences, or that they thought it would affect other victim-survivors' decisions around reporting:

[The media] don't report rape correctly but also women don't come forward because they know that they're not going to be taken seriously if they report that. (Kiera)

I think any negative attitude towards the victim in the media, I think, has a detrimental effect...on whether women will ultimately come forward. (Tess)

Some of the women that I've spoken to, and the men that I've spoken to, are even less likely to report sexual violence because of the way people [are] treated in court but also the press. So I think there's a while sort of feeling that because you're going to be blamed, because they're going to pick a hole in what you've done...that actually they feel that they can't seek justice. (Sophie)

I think even something as basic as someone coming home and telling their parents that they've been a victim of rape, like people don't know how to deal with it correctly, and they take all their cues on how to deal with [it] from these glamourized awful shows, and from the victim-blaming rags that they read...it makes for some very bad situations where people automatically know that they're not going to tell their parents or they're not going to take this any further. They're not going to go to the police, the police'll never believe me. (Bianca)

For some of the participants, they identified media affecting disclosing and who they told in their personal lives about the sexual violence:

It made me feel like 'Oh well, maybe I don't want to tell anyone, maybe I don't want to tell my friends what's happened because I don't want to have this conversation with them, where they're going to ask me what I was wearing' and even though obviously my friends are nice people, I almost just didn't want to risk it. (Shauna)

I don't tell people about what happened to me...because it's almost like I've been trained into thinking like even if it's not my fault, I shouldn't talk about because these are the ways that people [who] do talk about it then get treated. (Bianca)

It definitely meant that I felt a lot more ashamed, I was less able to disclose it, I didn't disclose, I didn't go to the police because of my own like, because of me being harmed, I went to the police because of my son being born premature [as a result of rape]. (Naomi)

As well as the quotes above, Jessica shared her experience about going back to the police after seeing a report about a case very similar to her own, which was discussed earlier in the chapter.

#### 7.8.6 – Other Consequences

There were also a number of other consequences that participants identified that did not necessarily fit into the categories above. For example, participants described how other people interacting with media (for example, on social media) had affected them:

Emily: Every time an article came out, people say [Brock Turner] should get more time, all the people who were thinking ‘oh he’s okay, he’s a good lad’, just like proper piled in on them...

Researcher: How was it for you, seeing those sort of comments?

Emily: It was, again, it just made me really angry...I was just terrified and confused and it made me just, you just feel so low cause everyone’s kind of turning their back against you after what you’ve been through and it’s just not what you need.

I think I found [Adam Johnson’s case] was really bad in terms of the victim-blaming and stuff because it was other members of the public and other members of society taking part and it all kind of added to what the media was saying, yeah that was really horrible. (Skye)

Similarly, Natasha described a lot of the comments on social media as ‘unhelpful’. Kiera described sharing articles about Ched Evans’ retrial on Facebook, and seeing a man she knew comment on another post saying ‘you deserve to be raped for accusing him’, and said:

It’s just one thing I think, thinking something like that, which I still think is obviously awful, but then feeling that you’re able to share that and have a voice and have a legitimacy to say that on a social media platform where you’ve got like hundreds maybe followers or friends or whatever, I think is terrible.

And that:

It really does bring it home, it made me feel sick...and the fact that he knew the guy that raped me when I was younger and stuff, it's just, I don't know, it's horrible.

Julia also discussed how the media is validating the behaviour of perpetrators:

A lot of the time, particularly when it's about domestic violence with regards to repeated incidences, um, cause my situation...I stayed in the situation for quite a long time...when they're like 'oh, why didn't she just leave?'. It makes me feel like it was my fault for not going earlier, which is almost saying everything that he did was fine because I could have just left.

And:

Repercussions of [victim-blaming] are a lot wider than a lot of people seem to think...for the people who are inclined to be perpetrators it's validating their behaviour, it's 'well, if it this person's fault if I see somebody drunk that way, obviously it's their fault as well', so it think it's actually a really, really dangerous thing.

Some of the women interviewed also talked about how they chose to engage with the media. For example, Kate shared that she deliberately reads a lot of coverage because 'I don't want to forget that it happened to me'. Similarly, Natasha said that, sometimes she just has to 'turn it off', but other times, 'it's good to sit there and watch it and see actually how it's being portrayed'. Natasha also commented that, for big cases receiving a lot of attention, she can 'detach' from the coverage. This is something that Rosie also did, commenting that she liked to 'save up articles on my little to read pile and then [read] a whole set' in one go. When asked why she felt it was easier to engage with media like this she replied:

I think part of it is then it's over (laughs)...I very much like [to] get the crappy thing out of the way in one go rather than spread it out over the week and spend all week being reminded.

Therefore, some of the women interviewed here actively chose to engage with the media, despite some of the negative consequences they identified, in a way that they could manage effectively, and for their own reasons.

## 7.8 - 'If You Could Change One Thing...'

As with the supporters, the final question of the interviews with victim-survivors was 'If you could change one thing about how the media reports sexual violence, what would it be?'. A lot of the answers the women gave here came back to the language that the media was using, or the nature of the writing:

A lot of the things I've read they're not being very sensitive about the subject...the media needs to be more sensitive about this subject cause if they do it that just kind of allows everyone else to do it. (Emily)

I would really like them to be less graphic. I mean, I remember a headline I saw...it must have been six years ago...and it described *in the headline* like a girl frantically crawling away from a rapist to like send for help on Facebook...it was a really clear image of what had happened. (Rosie)

I think it's about objectivity and it's about um, I understand that they've got to have alleged and all that, but I think there is...objective dispassionate language that actually describes what happened rather than tries to be euphemistic or...sensationalist. (Ruth)

The wording. The wording of it, I think needs to be...reflective of the crime that's been committed. (Kate)

Similarly, Bianca felt there needed to be less of a focus on a victim's behaviour, such as their clothing or alcohol consumption, or the use of their private photos from social media as a justification in the press.

Others suggested more consideration of victims. For example, Tess felt that coverage needed more 'emotion, they need compassion...they need to think of the victim'. This was also

reflected in Sophie's wish for a greater recognition of how much it takes for a victim to go into a court room, and reflect on 'that additional vulnerability', as well as empathise more with the reality of the crime, and less on the sensationalist portrayal of it. Natasha also suggested that the media be 'more sensitive to the victim'.

There were also suggestions around portrayals of perpetrators:

I would actually say not to focus too much on the offender...they don't think about victims. (Skye)

That blame is shifted to where it should be so blame is on the attacker...it's just culturally recognising that the problem is not with women, the problem is with men who rape. (Shauna)

Whilst others felt there needed to be more factual or expert representations:

I think it would be...report just as much, proportionally, make sure that the amount of times that you report the people who lie about being raped...that could be balanced with the amount of times it seems to actually really happen in real life...so that it comes across as a minimal problem rather than the way it does right now. (Jessica)

I would rather they got information from people who actually know what they're talking about, I feel like a lot of it is the journalist's own opinion. (Julia)

Justine would change the focus on sexual violence committed within universities, although she felt it was important, but that it 'limits the conversation'. Therefore, there is a need to not focus on one 'type' of rape, but to ensure the conversation is representative. Kiera wanted there to be 'calling more people out for victim-blaming', or at least making more people aware of victim-blaming and how it can affect victim-survivors.

Reflective on her experiences of media coverage of teenage mothers, Naomi wanted 'anybody who was every allowed to write anything about sexual violence or...just about anything' to have to complete an 'intensive feminist consciousness raising course'. She felt that sexual violence 'comes into the reporting of all sorts of things'.

There are a range of suggestions here, but there are some similar themes – greater sensitivity, and more knowledge and awareness from those in the media.

## **7.9 - Summary**

A range of issues have been uncovered through the fifteen interviews conducted with victim-survivors, and the research makes a unique contribution to knowledge by examining what the participants felt the consequences of the media coverage of sexual violence on them had been. This ranged from affecting their emotional and mental health to physical health, and their trust within the criminal justice system. As well as this, the study looked at how victim-survivors felt about challenging victim-blaming, and their feelings and safety when doing so. This chapter has also discussed what the participants would change about media coverage if they could, and this included that the media be more sensitive and less sensationalist in its reporting of rape. The findings also present a number of issues that require further research, such as the role of social media in challenging victim-blaming, and how this can be both positive and negative for victim-survivors.

## Chapter 8 – Interview Key Themes & Discussion

### 8.1 - Introduction

This chapter will discuss the interviews with the Rape Crisis supporters and victim-survivors of sexual violence explored in the previous two chapters alongside relevant literature. It will do so by breaking the discussion down into key areas, as they relate to the research questions. These questions were:

1. What forms of victim-blaming are present in the media in high profile sexual violence cases, and how are they resisted?
2. What are the consequences of victim-blaming for women victim-survivors?
3. How do sexual violence support organisations resist these themes or mitigate their impact in their work with women victim-survivors?

### 8.2 - Ched Evans and Other High-Profile Perpetrators

Both victim-survivors and supporters discussed their feelings around the coverage of Ched Evans' retrial for rape in October 2016. As well as this, other high-profile cases were sometimes discussed, including those of other sportsmen, including footballer Adam Johnson and Stanford University student Brock Turner. The participants' feelings around these cases will be discussed here, providing answers to the first research question of how high-profile sexual violence cases are reported.

The volume of coverage that high-profile cases bring with them was raised by some of the participants interviewed. For example, Tess (victim-survivor) lived in the same city that Adam Johnson played for, and therefore saw both local and national coverage of his case, and described this as an 'overload'. Meanwhile, Skye (victim-survivor) described the coverage of Evans' retrial as 'everywhere', while Justine (victim-survivor) described the coverage of Brock Turner as a 'phenomenon' and 'a bit circus-y'. Research has found that cases of violence

against women involving a high-profile perpetrator are reported upon more than those involving non-high-profile perpetrators (Braber, 2014), and this draws upon the news values put forward by Jewkes (2011), particularly those of celebrity, violence and sex.

One of the concerns that coverage of Evans' retrial raised was that victim-survivors would be put in a similar position, whether this was being forced to go through a retrial, or the sharing of their sexual history. Jennifer (supporter) commented that she had worked with a woman who had also been raped by a sports person and the case was, for her, a reason 'why not to report, or when I report, this is what I'm going to go through'. Skye (victim-survivor) felt that the fact the case had resulted in a retrial and Evans was back earning high amounts in his career made her think 'in the eyes of society and the law...has he not done something wrong?...The law doesn't reflect what's wrong and right, does it?'. She had realised that the law might not protect her, and discussed this around her decision not to report her own case, saying 'so you just think, what does it take to get someone to be believed?'. Naomi (victim-survivor) described feeling desensitised to the entire criminal justice system, which she felt the case ultimately represented, making the not guilty verdict even more potent:

The fact that he got off eventually was just horrifying, it really horrified me, yeah cause I think when he was convicted, there was something in that, it just left me feeling like 'oh yes, finally! Like they don't get to win all the time', and it's like oh no, they do, they still do.

This lack of faith in the criminal justice system was also reflected in comments made by supporters:

I don't really have that much confidence that it will be that much different or that it couldn't happen again, you know there could be another Ched Evans couldn't there really, it could all happen all over again. (Samantha, supporter)

I think [the original guilty verdict] does some good in people's minds to see like 'oh, what happened to me wasn't my fault and you can get convictions on this' and it all

went downhill rapidly afterwards didn't it, with the 'well let's just have another trial'.  
(Tanya, supporter)

For Shauna, a victim-survivor whose case was similar and had also gone through an appeal, she shared that she had become 'quite attached' to the victim in the case, because of the similarities with her own case, and that she was 'really, really gutted when he had the conviction quashed'.

Like the victim in Evans' case, Shauna (victim-survivor) had also had her sexual history interrogated, and the retrial 'reopen[ed] that door that I've worked quite hard to close'. Similarly, Kiera (victim-survivor) felt concerned about the use of sexual history evidence, and how if she or her friends reported, this could be the 'difference between her getting justice' or not. Meanwhile, supporter Sheryl commented that women had concerns around their anonymity if their case should go to trial due to the case, and Samantha (supporter) shared that clients she had worked with had had similar fears, particularly when the woman had been forced to move home multiple times. High-profile cases in the media can therefore act as a reference point for victim-survivors, who may use them when weighing up the decision to report. For the participants in this research, the use of the woman's sexual history in the trial was 'absolutely disgusting' (Leslie, supporter), and the subsequent detailed reporting of her sexual history was 'pornographic' (Skye, victim-survivor), and was used to 'legitimise her treatment and also showed her up as obviously not a victim' (Kiera, victim-survivor). Kiera's comment calls back to Soothill and Walby's (1991: 82) argument that the sexualisation of women in rape news coverage, including coverage of sexual history, works to show that it is 'women who are the problem'. Use of sexual history in rape trials has been shown to remain despite attempts to limit its use (Durham et al., 2016; McGlynn, 2017; Zydervelt et al., 2017; Smith, 2018), and the Evans case therefore acts as a high-profile example of this. However, in this case, the woman's sexual history was not only presented in court, but in the national press. McGlynn (2017: 391) has therefore argued for urgent reform of the use of third-party sexual history evidence in rape trials, an argument supported by this research as it proves that use of such testimony can negatively impact upon victim-survivors as a whole. The fear of use of such evidence is yet another factor that victim-survivors have to take into account

when considering reporting, and this includes fears that it could be go on to be reported in the press.

This also links into the sexualisation of victim-survivors in high-profile cases, and participants felt that the (underage) victim in the Adam Johnson case was also sexualised, and consequently blamed for her abuse. For example, Rosie (victim-survivor) recalled coverage calling the girl a 'slut and a whore', and Bianca (victim-survivor) had seen articles including sexualised photos from the girl's social media. Tess (victim-survivor) had seen 'graphic details' about the abuse the girl had been through. This highlights that the inclusion of 'titillating' (Soothill and Walby, 1991: 3) material about a victim-survivor is still used in the media, and this is done to present victims (including children) as 'temptresses', and to prove that she 'provoked the assailant with her sexuality' (Benedict, 1992: 18). This can also be strongly seen in Sophie's (victim-survivor) account of the coverage of Doug Richard's trial, which relied upon the idea that the girls involved were manipulative.

As well as the presentation of the women in the cases being important, the presentation of high-profile perpetrators was also a key part of participants' discussions. With a not guilty verdict for Evans came the idea that he had been the real victim in the case, as suggested by Jordan (2004a). This was apparent in participants' discussion of Evans, as well as other high-profile perpetrators, even those who had been found guilty, such as Adam Johnson. For example, Danielle (supporter) felt that Evans was 'consistently' seen as the victim in the case, whilst Leslie (supporter) described coverage of Evans and Johnson showing them as the 'perfect victims of lying women', whilst Kate (victim-survivor) felt that Evans had 'made himself look like the victim'. This therefore links with beliefs that false accusations are common (Lovett and Kelly, 2009), and that women lie about rape for money or revenge (Waterhouse-Watson, 2013), with athletes being victims when accused of sexual violence (Waterhouse-Watson, 2012, 2018). Similarly, Sophie (victim-survivor) felt that Evans was also presented as a victim as he had lost his job, and even when Evans was found guilty at the first trial, 'there was the notion that in some way he shouldn't have to be vilified for it'. As well as this, the focus on Evans' partner and family was mentioned, with Ruth (victim-survivor)

feeling that the presence (and coverage of) Evans' partner at the trial felt 'very cynical', similar to Waterhouse-Watson's (2016b) finding that coverage focused on the emotion of Australian footballer Brett Stewart's girlfriend at his rape trial. This victim presentation reached a peak for Leslie (supporter) when she saw language to describe Evans' experience of being found not guilty, and 'almost every word...was literally like all the words that you would read in any standard symptoms list' of having experienced sexual violence. This all contributes to the idea that men who perpetrate violence against women are victims themselves (Taylor, 2009).

Evans' (and Johnson and Turner's) status as a sportsman was also thought to have been important in how he was presented. Kate (victim-survivor) felt, for example, that the victim was automatically 'in the wrong', as Evans' footballer status prevented balanced views, clearly linking to Waterhouse-Watson's (2013: 35) argument that victims in these cases are at 'an immediate disadvantage', precisely because they are unknown whilst the defendants are well-known, and have ready-built support systems through their fans.

### **8.3 - Individuals' Resistance To And Challenging Of Victim-Blaming**

#### **8.3.1 - In Personal Life**

Many of the participants said that they would challenge victim-blaming in their personal lives when they heard it, although this was more mixed amongst the victim-survivors. However, doing such challenging was not without risks for participants. For example, some of the women interviewed had concerns around the risk of 'exposing' yourself as having experienced sexual violence:

I don't want to put myself out there as being somebody that it happened to so no. Because I think it's putting you in a vulnerable position and on the flipside if I was kind of casually saying over social media well this happened to me and this is how I, then you're going to get people question whether it did actually happen to you because you're so open and honest about it. (Kate, victim-survivor)

It's one of those weird things where you don't necessarily want to *out* yourself as a victim of child sexual abuse. (Rosie, victim-survivor)

I think there's this kind of implicit unspoken assumption that like either because I'm working in this area, I'm not a victim, but I'm a really nice person cause I want to help those other victims, or I am a victim and therefore we don't really want to ask you what that's about. (Leslie, supporter)

Women also described the safety work (Kelly, 2016) and the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) that they did around deciding when they felt they were able to challenge victim-blaming when they encountered it in their personal lives. Sometimes this came down to did they feel physically safe to challenge the victim-blaming:

The reality of it is it really does depend on who is saying it and when and ultimately you have to put your own safety and stuff first. (Skye, victim-survivor)

There are situations where I don't feel comfortable doing it, for example if I happen to be in a bar or something pops up in conversation with a bunch of men and I'm on my own, I won't do that. (Julia, victim-survivor)

At other times, it was a matter of feeling emotionally able and in a place as to whether they felt they could challenge the victim-blaming:

Sometimes it's like I don't want to if you know what I mean, sometimes you do just want a day off, don't you? (Samantha, supporter)

If you did it on every occasion, you'd just be like exhausted. You'd just be, you wouldn't be able to deal with day to day life, I don't think (laughs) if you are always challenging everything...Ultimately I need to look after myself so sometimes, even though you've been through something, you like don't have the energy to challenge it. (Skye, victim-survivor)

Or even around was it worth the risk to their personal relationships:

The flipside of that what makes it easier if I trust that the person isn't going to reject me forever, if I say something. (Sheryl, supporter)

I mean you're constantly facing this like 'well what if I completely alienate my person I work with or my brother or etc' but it's also like I literally just can't hear it. (Rosie, victim-survivor)

Challenging victim-blaming was often therefore mixed, in that women felt nervous about engaging in challenging, and concerned about the reaction they would receive, but they felt it was important to do:

I guess for me, like the cost of not speaking out is more important than the cost of alienating people (laughs). (Naomi, victim-survivor)

Again, depending on who you're taking the fight up with but it's really scary cause you don't know what you're going to be given back but most of the times I just feel really good, cause you know you're sticking up for someone and I could have used someone sticking up for me back then. (Emily, victim-survivor)

It's not very comfortable but I am of a mind generally in life...of being the change you want to see in the world, which is something I am really committed to. It's hard. And it just is hard...I think knowing that that's going to be uncomfortable but it's the right thing to do is what matters to me. (Ruth, victim-survivor)

It is difficult but it's good when you do challenge somebody cause you might make them think from a different perspective. (Natasha, victim-survivor)

As can be seen in Emily, Ruth and Natasha's quotes above, women talked about how hard challenging victim-blaming could be, and the emotional impact of resistance:

You feel like you're trying to stop an ocean, or a tidal wave or something, you can only do what you can do, it's exhausting, slightly disheartening. (Jennifer, supporter)

I feel quite tense because I feel that I'm just on the edge of them maybe being like I don't know, disagreeing and saying something that I would struggle to hear. (Shauna, victim-survivor)

From the above, we can see that women are practicing safety work when they are challenging victim-blaming, weighing up the nuances of each individual situation, and the possibilities of how the person they are challenging will react, therefore responding to both the actuality and the possibility of a negative and potentially violent reaction. This was seen in Ruth's (victim-survivor) response that she could only resist victim-blaming if she was feeling '100%' up to it, as otherwise she would be 'frightened a man is going to shout at me, you know I'm frightened that some man I don't know is going to shout at me on Twitter'. The women interviewed here were, as Kelly defines safety work (2016: xi), employing 'thinking processes, decision making and embodied watchfulness', with such processes requiring time, energy and effort. The concept of safety work can therefore be extended beyond its initial theorisation of safety work as a response to men's violence and can be applied to the potential validation of such violence by others, through the blaming or disbelief of victim-survivors.

### 8.3.2 - In News Media

Less common was participants discussing directly challenging news media on an individual basis, and this was distinct from challenging in participants' personal lives:

I think in my personal life, like if I was having a conversation with someone and they said something that I felt was victim-blaming, I would call them out on it um but in the media I don't tend to call it out, no. (Shauna, victim-survivor)

Tess and Shauna, both victim-survivors, had described their experiences of challenging news media, with Shauna remarking that she had stopped commenting on news articles to challenge victim-blaming, as it was 'just deathly'. Similarly, Tess had had a negative experience when complaining to the BBC about their coverage of Jimmy Savile, and she stated that she had felt 'powerless' against them, and that she was 'just one person against the media'. Therefore, whilst social media may offer a space for resistance (as will be discussed later in the chapter), participants did not necessarily feel there was an effective space to resist victim-blaming in the news media.

## **8.4 - Organisations' Resistance To Victim-Blaming**

For the supporters, there were two levels to the resistance and challenging of victim-blaming that they engaged in; client-facing roles (such as counselling or on the helpline), and public-facing roles, including in the media, being at community events and on social media. Supporters also suggested that this resistance was done through roles engaging other institutions, such as training they delivered, or by sitting on police panels, but this was not discussed in detail. The support and media work roles, and the tensions between them, were also discussed by victim-survivors. This section of the chapter therefore explores the answers to the third research question of looking at how specialist sexual violence support services resist victim-blaming.

### **8.4.1 - Through Direct Support**

This resistance by specialist sexual violence support services was also conducted through the direct support. For Danielle, a supporter, challenging victim-blaming was 'part of every single bit of work that we do', and this impacted upon *how* women victim-survivors were supported by those in the services interviewed:

Well the biggest way that I do it is just when women are talking and they say things like, it's just picking up what they say, when they use victim-blaming phrases or when they reflect something and then, like one of our easiest ones is to do which when she goes 'oh but I shouldn't have been that drunk', so one of my easiest ways to go is

‘when guys get that drunk, do they get raped?’ and they’re like ‘no’... Just flipping it on its head a little bit to see it from a different perspective instead of saying ‘you’re not responsible, this is a you know a manifestation of patriarchy arghh’, you know I just kind of flip it on its head a little bit to see it from a different perspective. (Jennifer, supporter)

They do say ‘you know I was out drinking when it happened’ and you go ‘okay, well why do you think it’s important that you were out drinking when it happened?’ and she’ll go ‘well you know I was vulnerable, what did I expect?’ and we go ‘what did you expect, just out of curiosity, when you were getting ready that night?’ and ‘well you know I thought I’d go out with the girls and have a few drinks, have a good dance’ and go ‘*that*, that’s what you expected’ and just talking it through and kind of breaking it down with them but gently doing it and kind of helping themselves work backwards to see that oh actually no, I didn’t, I didn’t wear this skirt because I wanted this to happen, I wore this skirt because I looked really good and just kind of breaking it down for them. (Lisa, supporter)

I think I did do it with the counselling, that was a lot of it, of you know people would start off very much like ‘if I hadn’t have done this, and of course it was me, you know I did this’ so I think you were constantly challenging that in a very gentle way to start with. (Samantha, supporter)

This support was therefore coming from an empowerment perspective – gently challenging and empowering the victim-survivors to understand in their own time and words why the blame (either from others or from themselves) does not lie with them. However, also within this, some supporters recognised a need to stay with how the woman was feeling, and to not overrule her feelings:

You know kind of staying with them when they have those feelings and not em not negating those feelings you know recognising them and stuff, I think it’s also really important that we can reassure people that that’s not what we think. (Tanya, supporter)

I find words that don't automatically close them down I try to understand it from their point of view, and I get them to understand where my point of view is, and I try to establish that very quickly, that I am *not* going to be blaming them for anything they tell me, no matter what it is, you know because that's my start point. (Sheryl, supporter)

As well as this, and as can be seen in Sheryl's quote above, there was also a reiteration that the woman being supported was believed, which in a rape supportive and victim-blaming society, is a radical act in and of itself:

We believe women and it's not just that we believe women and girls that it happened to them, which sometimes is unique for women that actually this did happen...but also that we believe in them that it was not their fault, that we believe that they weren't to blame for what happened, so that belief is throughout, bigger than it just happened. (Danielle, supporter)

As explored in the literature review, research has demonstrated the benefits of Rape Crisis and specialist support for victim-survivors of sexual violence, including improved outcomes throughout the legal system (Campbell, 2006), and a reduction in the use of self-harm, and in suicidal thoughts, flashbacks and panic attacks, as well as an increase in feeling empowered and in control (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013). It was support from her local Rape Crisis centre that allowed Ruth (a victim-survivor) to feel like 'Wonder Woman...really strong and really capable' most of the time. This research suggests that it could be the nature of support that is being offered by specialist sexual violence services that could lead to such positive impacts.

#### 8.4.2 - In the Media

Both supporters and the victim-survivors identified a number of challenges in engaging in this more forward-facing work, especially with the media. One of these was resources, with

multiple supporters identifying that they would like to do more media work, but struggled with capacity to do so:

Samantha: I would imagine, probably, if we had somebody doing it I don't know a few days a week, we could proactively go through a heck of a lot of stuff and then always do a challenge

Researcher: So it's a matter of resources?

Samantha: Yeah, but because we haven't got that so you know like a lot of people in places, don't they, have communications officers now and social media people, that would be ideal. (Samantha, supporter)

The difficulty with resources was also acknowledged by the victim-survivors:

Julia: Rape Crisis, the work they do is absolutely fantastic, it's brilliant but they don't necessarily have the reach to get to every single person...they're financially restricted, so getting on a really, really massive, wider scale is difficult... [they] don't have the resources to make it very widely spread so the media that we see is the negative stuff even though there are people working their socks off to put the positive stuff out there.

Researcher: Mm. So it's just that the positive doesn't have the same reach as the negative?

Julia: Yeah, exactly, you have to actually seek it out, rather than it just being readily available to you.

The struggle with resources for specialist sexual violence services is well-documented, with chronic underfunding facing Rape Crisis centres despite increased demand for services (Women's Resource Centre, 2008; Rape Crisis England & Wales, 2018a). A lack of resources to deliver services overall also impacts on how specialist sexual violence support services, such as Rape Crisis, can be resisting victim-blaming at a structural level. If staff are consumed by funding concerns, and 'fighting fires' (in the sense that preventative and more long-term work is limited by lack of funding), then this invariably impacts the other work that they can

do. This is despite, as Danielle (supporter) suggested, there being two strands to Rape Crisis work, the individual and the institutional, with 'a link from our frontline work all the way through all of the other work we do'. As highlighted by Samantha's quote above, there is also a disparity between smaller, local, underfunded charities and much larger, well-funded charities, in terms of their reach when engaging with the media.

As well as this, there were also issues with the media seemingly not wanting to engage with specialist support services. For example, Lisa (supporter), had tried to engage with a local newspaper, and, despite an initially positive response, nothing had come of the conversation:

Lisa: I just got in touch with the reporter saying do you mind in the future, if you're ever posting about sexual violence can you just include the Rape Crisis contact details?...he was like 'yep sure great I'll put it through to the press desk', whatever (pause) nothing.

Researcher: He hasn't done it?

Lisa: Nope..

Again, this was echoed by some of the victim-survivors who were interviewed:

[The media] very rarely consult the very groups you would think would be the first point of call, um...I don't think so, like it's funny how people don't use the resources that are there because they love to sensationalise things and they clearly know that these groups won't say the things that they want to hear um, cause these groups will say things like it's not the victim's fault, this is an awful situation, the best we can do is x y and z whereas what they want is inflammatory people that will get them the clicks and the likes and whatnot. (Bianca, victim-survivor)

I'm sure there will have been like statements and things happen at the time, but they don't, they're not given much importance are they, like people want to hear all the little gory details and it's like a, it's just a tabloid thing, innit? And I think people want to like shame the victim a bit and they want to play into that...you don't seem to have people saying oh you know if you've been affected by these issues, you can come and

talk to us, you do get that with other mental health, you know with suicide and stuff, maybe not so much with rape and sexual assault. (Skye, victim-survivor)

This is also evidenced by the findings of the media analysis of this research, which had incredibly little amounts of engagement with specialists, whether this was with academics or practitioners specialising in sexual violence. This was also highlighted by Soothill and Walby (1991: 148), who found a lack of attention paid to feminist academic work on rape, and even with such work being ridiculed. This research therefore highlights that, alongside a lack of attention on academic research, there is also a lack of attention on specialist sexual violence support services.

Similarly, as women had discussed the echo chamber of social media (in that they often saw similar views to their own), this worked both ways, with recognition that the support service's social media was, as Jennifer (supporter) put it, 'preaching to the choir':

I know that we do have a social media presence but I'm not sure how wide of an impact that actually has because when you're looking at people who follow us maybe on Twitter or Facebook, it's that kind of echo chamber thing where people are only actually interested in and believe in what we do follow us, so we're reinforcing the message to people who, it's preaching to the choir, so I try and share it. I share a lot of stuff wider but [organisation] in itself by its own presence I think it's kind of reinforce the message to people who are already on board with that message, I don't know how much further we get than that.

It's one of those things where they [Rape Crisis] have so much less traction and so much less voice. (Rosie, victim-survivor)

The dual role of organisations also presented a challenge, with a potential tension between working with victim-survivors and appearing in the media, and this affecting how support organisations were able to resist and challenge victim-blaming, and this was particularly

apparent when asked to comment on local cases. This concern was raised by both the supporters and the victim-survivors:

I don't know whether it's appropriate for them to do that cause they are a charity and I suppose they're in a difficult position aren't they? Because it's a confidential service, I know they can't throw themselves out there you know, they've got to remain quite anonymous really don't they, it's catch 22 for them, I think... I think as an organisation they've got to address it quite delicately don't they, but is it a charity's kind of job to do it or should the police be doing it, should the media be doing it, you know these charities need to focus on what they're going with the victims rather than what's being published in daft papers. I'm sure their times better spent doing what they're doing rather than fighting to change attitudes that maybe can never be changed. (Kate, victim-survivor)

I think charities like that I think they, they need a media profile but I also think the majority of their work is behind the scenes (Tess, victim-survivor)

One of the other things that is hard is that sometimes if you're talking about anything that's happened locally, that women might be accessing our services, and it would be very insensitive to kind of raise a comment on a case in some way it might prevent her from accessing our service. (Jennifer, supporter)

Sometimes [clients] don't like seeing that we're involved in that end of it and I've had, I've definitely had that with clients of my own...so I was their counsellor and even though I was, you know, trying to discourage victim-blaming they'd sometimes see me on the telly or on the radio and almost not like that, so I think that's sometimes just a tension for us as an organisation... so for with the Adam Johnson case, um, national [Rape Crisis England & Wales] really picked that up, and they were always the ones commenting saying and they do what we do they just kind of said 'we work with all victims' they made it more about the services, and I felt that was the right response

rather than have the individual centre where the woman was being supported do all the campaigning, but I can see that that's a bit of a tension...What I wouldn't want is that woman not feel able to access our services because of something we were saying or doing [in the media]. (Samantha, supporter)

Therefore, this demonstrates that there is a unique tension for specialist sexual violence support organisations, with the need to both offer confidential support for women and the need to be publicly visible and resist victim-blaming in the media having the potential to collide. This tension is perhaps heightened by staff involved in direct support also being involved in media work. At one Rape Crisis centre where supporters were interviewed, a group of staff and volunteers had been trained for media work and, whilst this still involved service delivery staff appearing in the media, Sheryl, a counsellor who did not do media work, commented that having a set group of people involved in media work meant that she felt much more able to keep 'safe boundaries within the therapeutic context', as she knew she would not suddenly be called upon for an interview or comment. As discussed above, resources also come into this – doing media work was not the sole responsibility of any of the supporters interviewed, and it is possible that a staff member who was not involved in such support and whose sole job was working with the media could alleviate these tensions. However, given the struggles some services face to stay open and to find funding to provide direct support, it may be that this is of secondary importance.

## **8.5 - News Media Resistance to Victim-Blaming**

Within the participants' accounts of the media, there was some evidence of the media resisting victim-blaming. This was often in openly left-wing publications, by independent writers or publications found online:

*Everyday Feminism*, which isn't a written publication, it's online and that is fab. *Teen Vogue* have done some wonderful stuff, but again they're very new and they're being very highly criticised for it... it is very much independent writers who do things online. (Julia, victim-survivor)

I would say in my little bubble, in my left-wing, feminist little bubble on Facebook, I'll see articles you know, maybe *Huffington Post* or *Everyday Feminism*, somebody like that will put articles but I don't really think mainstream do. (Lisa, supporter)

I suppose I'm a bit of a *Guardian* leftie (laughs) so I think columnists like Jessica Valenti, Hadley Freeman, people like that do quite often call [victim-blaming] out. (Shauna, victim-survivor)

However, this resistance seemed rare to participants outside of these sources. This is reflected in research findings, where there was some resistance to rape myths, but this was outweighed by the negative and blaming coverage (O'Hara, 2012; Rothman et al., 2012; Waterhouse-Watson, 2013). This came through in Sheryl's (supporter) views on the coverage of Ched Evans' retrial

I think if I ever have [seen good coverage], it's been overshadowed by all the negativity, and all victim-blaming, it was *all* victim-blaming.

Whilst Danielle summarised how she felt about the media challenging victim-blaming when asked if she could recall any instances:

(laughs) if I think of the mainstream media challenging victim-blaming – can you? No! What?! I definitely probably would have noticed! (Danielle, supporter)

### 8.5.1 - Social Media As Space For Resistance

A common place that the women interviewed reported seeing resistance to victim-blaming was through social media. Participants referred to social media sometimes feeling as a 'bubble' or an 'echo chamber', and were aware that their own spaces on social media were not necessarily representative:

I think it's that whole thing a little bit of if you're in the echo chamber you can't always see outside the echo chamber so for me it often feels like everybody's talking about

victim-blaming but that's literally a reflection of my own like online or digital spheres.  
(Leslie, supporter)

I definitely see more and more, particularly being on feminist twitter and being, existing in those space[s] means that I guess I see a lot but if I was to think about my sister who is on Facebook and is on non-feminist Facebook and reads the *Daily Mail*, I don't think that makes it into her consciousness not to the level that it needs to.  
(Naomi, victim-survivor)

However, despite this, some felt that the resistance and challenges to victim-blaming that could be conducted through the use of social media were powerful. The dichotomy of social media being both a space where blaming took place but was also resisted was commented upon:

I think the internet's been a great thing and an awful thing in that it's facilitated a lot of victim-blaming and a lot of sexual harassment, but it also gives people spaces where they can chat to other people like them and form networks and support groups. (Julia, victim-survivor)

[Social media] can be a double-edged sword. It can be very useful thing, but it can also be the worst thing they can enter into because sometimes they don't hear and get the support that they want, and they can be left feeling really awful and isolated and alone when they receive a reply from somebody who isn't supportive. (Sheryl, supporter)

Emily, a victim-survivor, had experienced both blame and support online when she disclosed, but had been supported and have positive experiences with one particular group for victim-survivors. Victim-survivors' actions online here could therefore be seen as a route to informal justice (Powell, 2015).

Naomi, a victim-survivor, felt that social media had incredible potential for resisting victim-blaming through the ability to resist on a large scale:

I think that has created an amazing opportunity for when a police force creates a campaign that is horrendously victim-blaming and because now we can get a critical mass, that will now get reported. [by the media]

And these comments were echoed by supporter Jennifer:

I think that the challenges don't come from the mainstream media but they come from the backlash on social media...that's the only times I've ever seen victim-blaming challenged in the media and it usually has come from people reporting at the reaction of people on social media, as opposed to a journalist taking their own initiative to report on it.

These comments are therefore fitting when considered alongside the 'unparalleled opportunities' that Salter (2013) suggested the internet offers for women as a space to share and act upon disclosures of sexual violence, as well as considering the activism that is possible through social media (Megarry, 2014; Keller et al., 2018). Social media was, for some of the women interviewed, a space to expose victim-blaming and allow for a collective response to such comments (Rentschler, 2014).

## **8.6 - Presentations in The Media**

Many participants discussed their belief that the media is victim-blaming in its coverage of sexual violence. Both Naomi and Ruth (victim-survivors) referred to victim-blaming in the media as 'wallpaper', something which was a constant presence and in the background of our lives. Danielle (a supporter) suggested that oftentimes victim-blaming in the media was subtle, whilst Tanya (a supporter) suggested victim-blaming in reporting was 'insidious'. Tess, a victim-survivor, felt that the media would 'glorify' reports of sexual violence, failing to see the victim involved as a person, who was 'hurt, vulnerable, families torn apart. They don't see that side of it at all'. Coverage was therefore felt to be consistently negative, and how this was done will be explored here.

As much of the discussion of how perpetrators were presented was done when discussing high-profile cases, this was explored earlier in the chapter, the rest of this section will explore how the supporters and victim-survivors interviewed felt about presentations of rape, of victim-survivors, of false allegations and other relevant issues in relation to the literature.

### 8.6.1 - Rape

The presentation of rape itself was discussed by participants, particularly by the victim-survivors. This included that many felt it was heavily sexualised, with Rosie commenting on the amount and type of detail that was included in reports:

It's also sort of like quite often a thing of like um when you're reading about a sexual assault case, like he *yanked* her hair, or, and then she was sodomised...this kind of detail is designed exactly to be salacious. (Rosie, victim-survivor)

Similarly, Skye (a victim-survivor) felt that people enjoyed hearing the 'gory details' of rape, saying that it acted as 'titillation' and perpetuated the idea 'it's exciting because it's a bit wrong'. These comments are in keeping with Soothill and Walby's (1991: 3) findings that coverage 'squeezes all manner of sexual detail' into articles. Rosie also commented that it was 'really gross' to be 'bombarded with quite graphic details' of rapes. Bianca, a victim-survivor, drew upon the example of the sexualisation of Adam Johnson's (teenage) victim, recalling articles where journalists had included photos of her 'looking made up...wearing tight dresses', so as to fuel the idea that 'this child is somehow responsible'. Such images are playing into the idea that teenage girls are 'temptresses', who deliberately seduce adult men (Soothill and Walby, 1991). As Lloyd and Ramon (2017) found that newspapers included photos of Reeva Steenkamp in a bikini in reports about her murder, Bianca also recalled nude photos of a woman who worked as a glamour model being included in articles about her kidnapping. The images of this woman and the victim in the Adam Johnson case were therefore aiming to present the women as 'vamps' – women who provoke rape with their sexuality (Benedict, 1991: 18).

As well as this, some of the victim-survivors interviewed commented that they did not see their own experiences reflected in the cases that the media gave a focus to, including rapes that committed by a partner. For example, Naomi, who was raped by her husband, said that the media 'is just that constant drip drip drip of like the only real form of sexual violence [is] stranger rape'. Westmarland (2015: 131) has argued that rape by strangers is 'nearly always taken more seriously at a criminal justice, media and societal level', and this is echoed in the findings of research, such as that by Soothill and Walby (1991) and Greer (2003), with less attention being given towards rape committed by those known to the victim. As we know, stranger rapes are rarer, so it is concerning that the media over-represents these rapes at the expense of accurately representing the number of rapes committed by men that women know and trust.

#### 8.6.2 - Victim-Survivors

The presentation of victim-survivors, and how they were blamed for their rapes, was discussed by both groups of participants. For example, Leslie (supporter) commented that victim-blaming in the media was so common that 'you'd be more looking for examples of...perpetrator blaming'. Participants discussed how women were seen as undeserving and deserving rape victims and how rape myths and victim-blaming beliefs were used to distinguish between the two. Danielle (a supporter) commented that, even when the media thought 'they're being really good' in commenting how a woman was acting in the 'right' ways, they were creating 'a hierarchy of victims, and the press definitely feed into this hierarchy...and that some women and girls are more worthy'. Echoing this, Shauna (victim-survivor) commented that she felt that only some women (namely the elderly or very young) were 'given this freedom to be a victim', and everyone outside of these narrow groups had their behaviour questioned, which Meyers (1997: 57) has also suggested, with the very young and very old being seen as 'undeserving' of the violence they had been subjected to. Similarly, Naomi (victim-survivor) talked about the 'standard of who is rapeable and who isn't rapeable'. Bianca (victim-survivor) felt that journalists would go out of their ways to find information to make the victim 'look like the kind of person that would inspire sexual assault'. Tanya (supporter) used the example of women's sexual history, arguing that use of this 'is automatically planting into the readers' and the watchers' mind' that it is linked to the rape.

Such blame has been well documented in previous research, and the idea of a hierarchy of victims is echoed in Benedict's (1992) dichotomy of 'virgins' and 'vamps'. The blame that participants felt victim-survivors were subjected to in the media can be summarised by comments from Sophie (victim-survivor), when she stated that the coverage of one case made her realise 'how females are still regarded by so many as sort of strange characters...like those mermaids that can lure sailors to their deaths', therefore being seen as responsible to the point of excusing any responsibility for the perpetrator.

Some of the victim-survivors interviewed also drew upon how they felt victim-survivors were portrayed as being 'fragile beings', with this idea of fragility became 'a weird part of the blaming' (Sophie). Similarly, Bianca commented that she felt coverage showed 'rape victims [as] damaged goods'. These presentations left Sophie feeling that victim-survivors were rarely presented as 'just normal people'. Kitzinger (2004: 43) found that one of the reasons victim-survivors praised the character of Beth Jordache in the soap *Brookside* was because it was 'realistic'. One of Kitzinger's participants commented that previous presentations were 'strange, different', but that the character of Beth was strong (Kitzinger, 2004: 43-44). This therefore suggests that the media is failing in showing victim-survivors as normal people, who are not defined for life by the abuse they have experienced.

### 8.6.3 - False Allegations

The victim-survivors who were interviewed also pointed towards the coverage of false allegations, or allegations that were inaccurately deemed to be false (such as when someone had been found not guilty of rape). Echoing Kelly's (2010) findings that false allegations are over-represented in the media, Bianca (a victim-survivor) commented:

I think the media don't do enough to hammer home how rare false rape accusations are, because they, I've seen people do little bits on like people who've been falsely accused of rape and been imprisoned and 'look we need to avoid this' and the reality is not like that, the reality is false rape accusations are very, very few and far between, the few that have happened, a lot of them are quite high profile...beyond that, conviction rates for rape and sexual violence are dramatically low but no one ever

reports on that, they never talk about it, because it's not what people want to hear, they want to hear all these awful horrid women are lying.

Similarly, Kate (victim-survivor) also felt that coverage was 'very unbalanced', and that it was not 'particularly helpful really' to suggest women lie about rape when discussing the TV drama *Liar*. For Julia (victim-survivor), women being presented as liars was particularly difficult when it was done alongside mental illness, and the idea that 'she was mentally ill so she probably just wanted attention'. Reflecting on her own experiences of returning to the police after seeing an article about an extremely similar rape to her own, Jessica felt that false allegations were reported in a way to present a 'man's life to be ruined'. Bianca and Jessica's quotes also particularly reflects Jordan (2004a: 6) suggestion that 'a new breed of rape 'victim' has been championed: the falsely accused man'.

#### 8.6.4 – Other Presentations

Participants also pointed to the presentation of issues outside of violence against women as being a concern. This included presentations around gender more broadly, which was raised by both groups of interviewees as being an issue. Jane (supporter), for example, felt that the media portrayed women 'horrifically', with women being seen as objects and this linking into victim-blaming beliefs, whilst Tanya and Leslie (both supporters) linked portrayals of gender to a normalisation of abusive behaviours in (particularly heterosexual) relationships. Similarly, Skye (victim-survivor) felt that the portrayal of rape was 'all tied into all the stuff to do with gender norms and expectations and sexuality'. It is therefore important to recognise that such coverage is taking place within a sexist media more widely, and recognise and challenge this.

However, for Naomi, a victim-survivor, a significant factor for her was the presentation of single teenage mothers during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Naomi had been a teenage mother and was married to the father of her children, who had abused her, including instances of sexual violence. The press' depiction of teenage mothers, which Duncan (2007: 309) described as fitting within a 'social threat' discourse, greatly impacted upon Naomi's ability to identify and consequently leave the abuse. Hadfield et al. (2007) suggests that this vilification of teenage mothers was strongly apparent in tabloid newspapers, with a lack of

any positive stories around teenage mothers. This is clearly reflected in Naomi's experience, and she stated that 'media, my perception of teenage mothers motivated me to stay with an abusive partner'. Being married, Naomi felt excluded from the teenage mother support groups, whilst also recognising that her relationship status 'protected' her from the vilification most teenage mothers were subjected to in the newspapers:

I can't remember like stuff around reporting of sexual violence particularly cause at the time I didn't see myself as having been subjected to that, [but] I definitely know that my motivation to stay with my ex-husband was massively driven by not wanting to be a single parent, because then I really would be one of those teenage mothers and almost being like a married teenage mother made me not a real teenage mother... I think that whole, I know it's not the same now but I think like I can talk definitely with experience that those messages had a massive impact on me, that I like I stayed with somebody who was abusive for four years because I didn't want to be one of those teenage mothers. (Naomi, victim-survivor)

As some of Yardley's (2008) participants did, Naomi also distanced herself from other teenage mothers in order to avoid stigmatisation. Naomi therefore felt that, whilst not explicitly about sexual violence, the media coverage of teenage mothers at the time she was experiencing sexual violence was 'part of the victim-blaming' of her generation.

## **8.7 - Consequences of Media**

As seen in the two previous chapters, a number of consequences of the media were identified by both the victim-survivors and supporters, and these will be explored alongside relevant literature.

### **8.7.1 - Identifying Rape**

The media was identified as acting as a barrier to be able to identify as having experienced sexual violence, and this was due to the narrow definition of sexual violence employed by the media (Soothill and Walby, 1991), particularly through an over reporting of rape committed

by someone unknown to the victim. This was particularly apparent in the accounts of victim-survivors who had been raped by their partner:

Kiera: I don't think I told anyone because I was I didn't really see it as legitimate um act of violence as such.

Researcher: And do you think that the media sort of played into that, or plays into that?

Kiera: Yeah, definitely um because I think yeah like I said I don't think the media reports rape in that sense and because, or they don't report it correctly. (Kiera, victim-survivor)

It wasn't until I was a lot later that I even realised that like my own, what had happened to me cause it happened within a relationship as well so it was, I don't fit the stereotype you know. (Skye, victim-survivor)

Similarly, supporters reported a lack of realistic coverage as inhibiting identifying that sexual violence had taken place:

Because people are using those media examples to make sense of what actually counts as sexual violence, they then are inferring that their experiences as not as bad, or don't count really as rape...so they'll be making little links between little things and creating this little parameter of what they think counts as rape, and then because their experiences aren't being reflected in anyway, um, then they can't really infer that that is violence in the first place, so that's one way, I think. (Leslie, supporter)

Apparently a woman in *Eastenders* got raped by her brother-in-law...that one was I think really helped with the 'it's usually somebody that you know' started kind of to dispel the stranger myth cause in that one I know my Mum was like '...that can't be right because rape is only if it's somebody you don't know'. (Samantha, supporter)

Skye also felt that the early days of coverage of abuse committed by Harvey Weinstein had made her reconsider past experiences, and realise how she had considered these to be quite trivial. This maps directly onto Kelly's continuum of sexual violence (1989), considering a range of men's behaviours as violence, and Skye's realisation that it was not solely the rape she had experienced that was sexual violence.

However, there was also a potential silver lining to the cloud of a lack of realistic coverage, as Naomi reported:

But I suppose because, because the sexual violence I was subjected to wasn't from a stranger, a lot of the victim-blaming messages around what you shouldn't be wearing or where you shouldn't be going didn't impact me in the way they might somebody who was assaulted by a stranger, cause actually like those preventative methods weren't really, wouldn't have been useful to me anyway so it wasn't like I, I never thought 'oh if I hadn't have worn that, if I hadn't have gone there', like I was in bed with the person I was married...A lot of the kind of media portrayal of loose women or whatever, that wasn't relevant particularly because...I didn't see my experiences as real sexual violence.

Examples of media that counter the idea of stranger rape being the only 'real' rape were therefore important in influencing people's ideas of what rape is, as can be seen in Samantha's quote above about the storyline in *Eastenders*. This is not the only example of a soap helping to dispel the stranger myth, as explored by Kitzinger (2004).

This demonstrates that the media can be a key influence, or a significant barrier, in whether or not victim-survivors of sexual violence identify their experiences as sexual violence. As explored in the literature review, news media significantly over reports sexual violence committed by a stranger (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Greer, 2003; Kitzinger, 2004), and this is at the expense of rapes committed by someone known to the victim. As argued earlier in the thesis, victim-survivors cannot access support services if they do not know they exist, but they also cannot begin to consider seeking support or reporting if they do not recognise themselves as a victim of crime to begin with. This is also put forward by Kelly and Radford

(1996), who argue that women need to be able to name their experiences in order to speak about them. By embracing such a narrow definition of sexual violence, as Soothill and Walby argued in 1991, the news media is dangerous and irresponsible, and is contributing to preventing victim-survivors of sexual violence from being able to recognise their experiences as violence.

### 8.7.2 - Reporting and Disclosing

The media was also identified as impacting whether victim-survivors would disclose or report the abuse to the police. This might have been in a positive way, in that media prompted people to disclose, and this was particularly apparent in the supporters' accounts. For example, Leslie felt that coverage of a particular case may prompt people to disclose similar experiences on the helpline, whilst Jane felt that large cases, such as Rochdale and Jimmy Savile, had led to an increase in self-referrals for counselling. Similarly, Danielle also felt that Savile had led to increased referrals, with a 'recognition of the historical', and a legitimising that you can still be affected years after the abuse took place. As well as this, Danielle used the phrase 'me too' before it became a signal of a global movement, saying that Savile led to 'that 'me as well' affect, 'me too, this happened to me, too' and it's okay to come forward after years'. Sheryl, a supporter, told me how she had seen an increase in the number of clients who were currently involved with stages of the criminal justice system, although she felt that overall, most women did not report. As was explored in the introduction of this thesis, reporting rates are on the rise, but are still in the minority. It is unclear how greater coverage of high-profile cases such as Ched Evans, the Yewtree investigation into Savile and others, plus attention paid towards movements such as #MeToo contribute towards these rising levels of reporting, but this is worthy of further exploration.

However, there were also negative associations, in that women felt unable to report or disclose, for fear they would not be believed or taken seriously, including either by friends or the police. For example:

I don't tell people about what happened to me...because it's almost like I've been trained into thinking like, even if it's not my fault, I shouldn't talk about this thing

because these are the ways that people do talk about them get treated. I think it's quite interesting when a celebrity comes forward and talks about like a history of sexual assault or whatever, people are always very quick to doubt them and say all sorts of manner of things about their lifestyle or whatever, so it's like, if someone who's like generally well liked in the public eye can't even get like an ounce of respect for their story. (Bianca, victim-survivor)

[The media] made me feel like oh well maybe I don't want to tell anyone, maybe I don't want to tell my friends what's happened because I don't want to have this conversation with them where they're going to ask me what was I wearing. (Shauna, victim-survivor)

The supporters also highlighted how the media prevented disclosures and reporting:

The first thing you get told is that one you're not going to be believed, secondly you're going to be torn apart, you're going to be called a liar and a slag and a money digger and a whore and your entire past is going to be dug up, your right to anonymity which you have will obviously somehow get revealed and you'll get threats and death threats...[Media] puts women off reporting, and I know that for a fact from the women that I work with, that they're just like I'm not going to put myself through that. (Jennifer, supporter)

News media had particularly impacted Jessica (victim-survivor), and her decision to report. As explored previously, she had read an article reporting on a case which had extremely similar circumstances to her own experience, which had led her to then go back to the police. She felt that, had the article been written in a different way, it may not have prompted her to return to the police, and she felt that it suggested that because the man arrested had been released, it was obvious he was not at fault, whilst also suggesting that the victim was seeking attention. This led to Jessica feeling guilty 'that I hadn't pushed [reporting] harder...maybe someone else had been attacked...by the same person'. This had left Jessica feeling 'very...anxious and depressed for quite a while after that'. Jessica's decision to then return to the police, despite her previous experiences (and the resulting experience also being

negative), links to Samantha's (supporter) comments that, in her experience, women decide to report because they do not want the same thing to happen to someone else, and are therefore feeling responsible for other women who may potentially become victims.

These fears around not being believed run parallel with the levels of rape myth acceptance amongst police (Jordan, 2004b; Sleath and Bull, 2012), barristers (Smith, 2018) and juries (Ellison and Munro, 2008), as well as low conviction rates for rape in England and Wales, despite an age of great legal reforms (Temkin, 2010). If the media is presenting an inaccurate portrayal of sexual violence, as Soothill and Walby argued in the 1990s, then this is undoubtedly impacting on women's views of sexual violence and the criminal justice system's response to rape. It is therefore unsurprising that many of the victim-survivors interviewed, and many of the women the supporters had worked with, had doubts about reporting to the police.

### 8.7.3 - Self-Blame

Self-blame was a reported consequence of the media, particularly by supporters when talking about their experiences of working with multiple women. Stanko (1985) suggests that self-blame is a common reaction to rape and is the result of rape myths and the reactions of those around victim-survivors. The media is therefore a further source of these myths and reactions for victim-survivors. This was echoed in the comments made by supporters, who suggested that victim-survivors see victim-blaming beliefs and apply them to their own experiences:

If you've experienced rape and sexual abuse and see this attitude in the newspaper, for example and they're talking about an incident that's similar to what happened to you then of course you would then pull those attitudes onto yourself and see them as not just talking about the woman in that article but talking about you. (Danielle, supporter)

We know that survivors of sexual violence often experience feelings of guilt, those questions of 'what if' or 'if only I hadn't', em, kind of scenarios play out in their head

and I think if you then have a news article that appears to portion some of the blame to the woman that just reinforces...those feelings. (Tanya, supporter)

It was also found in the comments of the victim-survivors. For example, whilst Natasha did not feel to blame for what happened to her, she felt that the media could evoke such feelings in others:

I don't feel like I'm to blame for what happened to me however when it's for other people, it can be quite difficult to be honest, really difficult cause obviously you start to question 'oh was it the way I dressed that provoked him, her to do what they did to me?'

Whilst other victim-survivors had experienced this self-blame as a result of the media:

I think [the media] absolutely can make you feel like oh well I deserved it, what *did* I expect? (Rosie, victim-survivor)

I think it makes me question um whether I could have done anything different and uh and I think because the impact of rape and sexual violence on me has been and I think many people, has impacted on my self-esteem, my self-confidence but actually I think um ways into blaming me I'm actually like, I had to work very hard to not absorb. So it feels like, yeah pushing the crime back down on me. (Sophie, victim-survivor)

[Media coverage] makes me think back over it, about what I personally could have done differently, and the more you think about it, the more you think I should have said this, done this at this time or maybe that was why it happened or god if I hadn't been such a pushover, if I hadn't been so weak etc. (Julia, victim-survivor)

Linked to this were feelings of shame, with Naomi (victim-survivor) reporting that the media increased the shame that she felt, and Jessica (victim-survivor) also saying that media coverage could lead her to feel ashamed. Supporters often therefore spoke about challenging self-blame, as well discussed in the resistance to victim-blaming through direct support earlier

in this chapter. Specialist support has been shown to lead to a reduction in self-blame, with Westmarland and Alderson (2013) finding a reduction of 11% in feeling responsible for what had happened at the first and last data collection point. Supporters' challenging self-blame, and considering how this self-blame can be exacerbated by media coverage, therefore continues to be important.

#### 8.7.4 - Emotional

As discussed in the previous findings chapter, the most common emotion in response to the media was anger. This was not something particularly reflected in the literature around consequences of sexual violence, but it is an emotion which gives victim-survivors more agency and power than feeling upset might afford them. It is in direct contention with the idea that victim-survivors are 'fragile beings', as reported by Bianca and Sophie earlier in this chapter. Being upset by media was also an emotional affect reported by victim-survivors and supporters in this research. However, these feelings of upset and anger were not just for the victim-survivors' own experiences, but for the women who were currently being reported upon in the media – those likely to be going through their own experiences, particularly within the criminal justice system. It was therefore not individualistic, but collective, with victim-survivors empathising with the woman in the press' current situation.

As well as this, some of the victim-survivors reported feeling unable to meet with or discuss their experiences with friends, adding a risk of social isolation. For example, Shauna had cancelled plans with her friends during coverage of Evans' retrial because it had made her 'so upset'. Meanwhile, Bianca had experienced her friends treating her differently whilst on nights out, which had, at times, made her feel 'like a headcase', saying 'I can still function...I don't need constant protection'. Concerns about becoming socially isolated are therefore another aspect of the emotional consequences of media coverage of sexual violence. Social withdrawal was noted as an immediate consequence of sexual violence by Jordan et al. (2010), and it is therefore possible that the media can exacerbate these feelings and create them on a longer-term basis.

### 8.7.5 – Mental Health

There were also a range of mental health consequences disclosed by the victim-survivors and supporters. One consequence was that the media ‘triggered’ victim-survivors, with this having a number of consequences, including flashbacks, feelings of being scared, and depression. As noted by Kelly (1989) and Westmarland and Alderson (2013), flashbacks are a common and long-term effect of sexual violence, and Jordan et al. (2010) noted that feelings of fear were also experienced in the immediate aftermath of sexual violence. As suggested above, then, the media seemingly has the potential to reignite the immediate feelings that occur after sexual violence. As well as this, Julia, Rosie and Skye, all victim-survivors, reported that the media had impacted upon their PTSD. Studies have found that as many as 65% of victim-survivors can develop PTSD (Jordan et al., 2010), so it is therefore a key concern that the media could affect victim-survivors’ PTSD. Self-harm is also recognised as a potentially long-term consequence of sexual violence (Westmarland and Alderson, 2013), and Shauna, a victim-survivor in this study, reported having used this previously, and having considered using self-harm again during the coverage of Evans’ retrial.

Linked in many ways to the mental consequences discussed above were physical consequences and sensations, and these were often a symptom of the mental consequences. For example, whilst describing her PTSD, Rosie discussed feeling physically disassociated from her body, ‘like being underwater’, as well as feeling ‘sweaty and constricted’ and physically sick. This sick feeling was also reported by fellow victim-survivors Skye and Natasha, who shared that TV shows ‘made my stomach churn’, and that she felt ‘sick’ when hearing the word rape. Others also reported that seeing coverage could lead to physical feelings, with Justine saying ‘it’s such a physical thing you feel in that moment’, and Jessica describing seeing anything that related to her own experiences as ‘a punch in the stomach’. Whilst the consequences discussed here are physical sensations, they relate to the mental and emotional consequences of seeing media coverage.

### 8.7.6 - Engagement with the Media

Some participants identified that the media representations of sexual violence affected how they would engage with the media, including sometimes choosing not to engage with it at all. Within this, as seen within the decisions made around challenging victim-blaming earlier in this chapter, victim-survivors are carrying out safety work when it came to their engagement with the media, managing this in such a way as to minimise the harm done to them through participating and absorbing of media. Kelly (2016: xi) describes safety work as ‘the thinking processes, decision making and embodied watchfulness that women employ’ in order to control what can seem like an ‘unavoidable risk’. Vera-Gray (2016: 147) considers safety work as a response to the ‘possibility and actuality of men’s intrusive practices’.

Rosie (victim-survivor) described how she would ‘save up articles’ to read all together, rather than read each article when she first saw it. When asked her why she found this better, she said that this allowed her to ‘get the crappy thing out of the way in one go rather than spread it out over the week and spend all week being reminded’. Here, Rosie is making a conscious decision to still engage with media coverage and articles on sexual violence, but is doing so in a way that feels more manageable for her at that point, and in a way that can negate how ‘crappy’ the coverage makes her feel. Similarly, Kate told me that she ‘spends a lot of time’ reading articles about cases because ‘I don’t want to forget that it happened to me’. However, she felt that when she was doing this, she found it ‘easy to kind of separate’, because she did not know the woman the article was about. Similarly, Natasha also commented that she could ‘detach’ from coverage, but sometimes she wanted to see how rape was being portrayed. She noted that whether she detached or engaged ‘varies from day to day’.

Some of the women reported simply not being able to engage with the media, with this being either a permanent or temporary solution for how the coverage made them feel. For example, Samantha (supporter) told me of a client she had supported who had to stop reading the *Metro* on her commute because of the frequency of reports of child sexual abuse, leaving her frightened of what was on the next page, with the articles causing her to feel panicky in public. For this client, she had reverted to not reading the newspaper, which was something she had

previously overcome. Jane, another supporter, told me that some of the women she had supported chose not to watch anything that involved rape, whilst others actively chose to do so.

Similarly, Samantha described that some of her clients found it easier when there was substantial coverage, such as of a TV show, *before* it aired. Using the example of the BBC drama *Three Girls* and the documentary on the same subject, she said that clients had told her that the coverage beforehand had enabled them to decide not to watch it in advance, knowing that it could cause distress or harm for them. This coverage was seen by Samantha as being better than the ‘warnings’ given at the start of shows, which were not explicit enough; they might warn of ‘violence’, but not specify that this was sexual violence. This was also echoed in Rosie’s comments about ‘trigger warnings’ on media pieces, which she stated allowed her to choose whether or not she felt emotionally able to engage with it at that time.

As has therefore been demonstrated above, victim-survivors of sexual violence are doing safety work, which includes the energy and effort that Kelly (2016) argues such work involves, when it comes to media coverage of sexual violence. As described by Vera-Gray (2016), some of the safety work described here was pre-emptive, and done in order to avoid seeing such coverage, or done so that the victim-survivor could best handle the effects it may have on her, such as by delaying engaging with it until feeling more able.

#### 8.7.7 - Others’ Interactions with Media

Both the supporters and the victim-survivors discussed that it was not just how women interacted with the media themselves, but how *others* around them (such as colleagues, friends or people on social media) interacted with the media. This was often around ‘big’ pieces of media coverage, including high-profile cases, and TV shows which received a lot of attention. Leslie, a supporter, commented on these interactions, and what these might mean for victim-survivors of sexual violence:

It's not just the content of how it's reported, it's the fact that because that's in like the media sphere, other people in their lives are starting to discuss it and make comments on it and often I think that's what's as upsetting for some of the...it's like the people they, in their lives, that's what's upsetting for them is watching how they pass judgments, victim blame those people in a way that has very obvious implications for them. (Leslie, supporter)

Similarly:

[Victim-survivors] see it in the media, they read the kind of comments that are being made, not only, you know, not only the fact that the media is saying these things but after that you've got it on social media, people going 'this and that and the other' and you're reading what your friends are saying about it so now you know that it's not just society wider, but my own friends and family think that she's just a lying slag. (Jennifer, supporter)

It is therefore not just hearing potentially victim-blaming comments from the people around them, but it is what these then imply for victim-survivors – if they say these things about someone else, are they thinking those things about me?

For high-profile cases, participants mentioned Ched Evans, Adam Johnson and Brock Turner, and often mentioned the victim-blaming comments they had seen on social media. For example, Sheryl (a supporter) recalled comments about the women abused by Jimmy Savile, which questioned why they did not tell someone or get help when it had happened so long ago, whilst Kate (a victim-survivor) recalled similar comments about Adam Johnson's victim. Similarly, Skye and Natasha, both victim-survivors, spoke about seeing these type of comments on social media, with Skye arguing that the victim-blaming directed at Adam Johnson's victim was added to by comments on social media, and that she had found it difficult as it was 'other members of the public and other members of society' making such comments. Kiera had had a similar experience seeing comments on articles about Ched Evans' retrial, including seeing (not receiving) a comment from a man she knew (and who knew her rapist) saying that a woman deserved to be raped for accusing Evans of having committed

rape. For Kiera, she felt that social media gave people a sense of legitimacy to make those types of comments, as they could have the support of hundreds of followers. Social media, then, presents a space where others can have their victim-blaming beliefs and comments validated, and high-profile cases provide a supply of articles for these comments.

Supporters also discussed TV shows, and the impact other people's discussion of these had had upon victim-survivors they had worked with. For example, Tanya told me that she had supported a woman who found the media sometimes made keeping parts of her life separate difficult. Giving the examples of the BBC drama *Three Girls*, and coverage of a local police operation, the woman had found it difficult that she could go into work and people would want to know her opinion on a TV show 'not because they know you're a survivor, but because that's what everyone watched on TV last night', meaning that

even if you spent your life never watching a depiction of rape and never watching anything or reading anything that had to do with child sexual abuse, that doesn't mean that you're isolated from any mention of it (Tanya, supporter)

A client of Samantha's had had a similar experience and Samantha shared that she found it difficult when people spoke about a TV show, whether factual or fictional, at work, and feeling conflicted about whether she could or should join in with these conversations:

She now has to sit there and kind of listen to what everybody's saying about this programme, and she sometimes get to that point of 'well, should I say that was, that was me, or actually that was a typical response or that was really accurate, that is what happens', so I guess people sometimes have to make those decisions sometimes, don't they, of how much do I want to join in? (Samantha, supporter)

Not being able to always join in with these conversations (for example, if they had chosen not to watch the show) had then led to some of the women Samantha had supported feeling 'kind of isolated that they can't join in with [what] everybody else is doing', particularly when shows were generating a lot of buzz and conversation. Similarly, Rosie, a victim-survivor, also talked about her experience of watching sitcoms, such as *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory*, where

sexual violence was presented (even if the show did not recognise it as such) with her friendship group as a teenager, and how uncomfortable this was for her when she would find everyone laughing whilst she felt panicked.

This highlights that the media engagement is not a sole activity. Particularly with the rise and growth of social media, we now absorb media collectively. Therefore, it is not just those physically around us who shape our, and victim-survivors', experiences of media coverage of sexual violence, but this is also done by those who are *virtually* around us.

#### 8.7.8 - Other Consequences

There were also other consequences that the media had had upon victim-survivors of sexual violence. Both Julia (victim-survivor) and Samantha (supporter) raised concerns that the media could affect perpetrators of sexual violence. For example, Julia felt coverage was not only upsetting for the individual victim it was reporting about, but for every single victim, but that it could affect potential perpetrators:

For the people who are inclined to be perpetrators it's validating their behaviour, it's well if it's this person's fault if I see somebody drunk that way, obviously it's their fault as well so I think it's actually a really, really dangerous thing (Julia, victim-survivor)

This is an area therefore requiring further research, building upon the work done by Schlesinger et al. in *Men Viewing Violence* (1998). As well as potentially therefore validating perpetrators' behaviours, Samantha pointed out that the media can publicise strategies for perpetrators to utilise in the criminal justice system. For example, she had supported a woman who had been involved in a court case where the defendant had used similar methods to those adopted by Ched Evans for his retrial, including hiring a private investigator to follow the woman in the case, resulting in a not guilty verdict for both Samantha's client and Evans. Samantha commented that the Evans case was 'I think that's actually where they got their knowledge from'.

However, there was also the positive consequence of seeing other women reporting made some victim-survivors feel like they were not alone. As mentioned when discussing the reporting of rape above, Danielle felt that coverage of the abuse committed by Jimmy Savile had made women realise that there were others who had also been abused, and Samantha had also had clients tell her that news coverage had made them feel less alone. Sheryl felt that media coverage could 'give [victim-survivors] courage' by highlighting other women going through the same experiences they had. It is important to recognise that, whilst the media undoubtedly had negative consequences on victim-survivors, there were positive consequences. This was also recognised by Kitzinger (2004) and Schlesinger et al. (1992), particularly around presentations of characters in soap operas. This lack of feeling alone in having experienced sexual violence is particularly relevant when considering the space that social media can now offer for victim-survivors as a space to disclose and receive support (O'Neill, 2018).

## **8.8 - Changes to the media**

Both victim-survivors and the supporters were asked about and discussed what changes they would like to see in the media coverage of sexual violence cases. Some of the changes participants reported they would like to see aligned strongly with the guidance published by the NUJ (2013), which was used in the media analysis portion of this research. For example, Julia, a victim-survivor, said that she would like the media to utilise expert opinion more, including that of practitioners and academic researchers, and this corresponds with the NUJ guidance to include educational materials, as well as Soothill and Walby's (1991) finding that the media does not cover academic research on sexual violence.

The NUJ guidance suggests that comments should not be made which blame the victim-survivor, including a greater sensitivity in how the victim-survivor is reported upon, or excuse the perpetrator, and this was a common theme in the participants' comments:

I think it would be to start with anyway, discussions of the way someone looks or what they wear, that always seems to come first, that or the drinking thing, it'd be one of

the two, like, obviously there are loads more issues there, but that one is always the one that gets me the most. (Bianca, victim-survivor)

It's the value judgements they place on the victim, so instead of just saying a woman was raped, it would be like any sort of description around she had been out drinking, she was wearing a dress, or single mother of two with a previous drug habit...if they could take the description of the victim out and focus on the crime that was committed and focus on the perpetrator of the crime, as opposed to describing yeah using descriptions of the victim that have got value judgements placed to them. (Jennifer, supporter)

A great[er] focus on the rapist and the characteristics of the rapist more than the characteristics of the woman...what she was wearing or her past sexual history or if she often went out to town or often walked home alone, you know, I don't want to know those things, but I do want to know what the characteristics of that man, does he have a history of violence, does he have a history of these kinds of attacks. (Tanya, supporter)

That the blame is shifted to where it should be so the blame is on the...culturally recognising that the problem is not with women, the problem is with men who rape. (Shauna, victim-survivor)

The quote from Shauna also recognises the need for rape to be reported as an issue of violence against women, another of the NUJ guidelines. This was also echoed in the changes Danielle and Samantha (both supporters) suggested, of an approach and way to frame the stories that is (as Danielle put it) 'socially responsible'.

Participants also pointed to how sensationalist, graphic and sexual the reporting of sexual violence could be, again aligning with the guidance issued by the NUJ, which included the

recommendation to avoid sexualising women and girls. This was particularly relevant during the interviews given the discussion of the woman involved in the Ched Evans case, and her sexual history, which was discussed earlier in the chapter. For Rosie, a victim-survivor, this type of coverage contributed to the idea that rape is 'kind of sexy', and she felt that including such detail was unnecessary, and only served to titillate people who 'think it's kind of hot'. Graphic descriptions in the news (she used the example of a woman having been described as frantically crawling away to try and get help) had caused panic attacks previously for Rosie. Ruth, another victim-survivor, commented that coverage often tried to be 'euphemistic', 'sensationalist' and 'gory', whilst Leslie, a supporter, also felt the use of irrelevant images and videos, using the example of a clip from pornography in a story about a woman being kidnapped, as well as images taken from the victim-survivors' social media which could be seen as being provocative. This sexualisation of rape, and the use of graphic detail has been well-documented in literature (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017), and Leslie's discussion of the use of images from victim-survivors' social media is similar to Lloyd and Ramon's (2017) finding of the *Sun* using images of Reeva Steenkamp in a bikini to report on her murder by Oscar Pistorius. The examples given by participants here also fit with Soothill and Walby's (1991: 3) assessment that the media is 'sensationalist and titillating' in reporting sexual violence.

As well as this, the guidance also suggest that reporters produce stories about 'the successful prosecutions of those found guilty of violence against women...as well as the successes many women have had recovering and rebuilding their lives' (2013: 3). This was echoed in comments made by Kate, a victim-survivor:

Kate: You hear the media appeals, they look for the person, but there never seems to be any follow up on what's gone on or what's happened or court cases unless they're massive, [they] don't get reported on, you don't often hear of victims getting justice unless they're big, big cases.

Researcher: So you don't hear any wins?

Kate: No, no. And you don't hear about charities like this [Rape Crisis] needing and helping victims, and they desperately need funds to keep going and you never see

anything positive about the work that they do and you know these save people, it might sound dramatic, but these save people's lives...these services go unnoticed so victims sometimes don't know that these services are available, I didn't know these services were available until I needed it.

As well as Sophie's comments about a lack of clarity of the criminal justice system overall and how the media could work to alleviate some of this uncertainty:

I wonder whether if there were more articles that could come through...where not only are the victim and the perpetrator part of that story but actually the whole issue of how do, how do judges, how do lawyers, how do juries see victims if it goes that far?...Once you go into a court room, of course a lot of the cases that are reported have gone that far so we don't hear about ones that...aren't taken forward...I think there's so much about the whole process that you don't know until you're in it um and I'd love for there to be a way somehow of being able to have much more information and stories in the press. (Sophie, victim-survivor)

Participants also raised issues that were not included in the NUJ guidelines. As seen in the discussion around the presentation of aspects of sexual violence earlier in the chapter, the issue of false allegations was frequently raised by participants, and this is something not explicitly covered by the NUJ document (although could be incorporated as part of the advice to include statistics and educational materials). For example, Jessica, a victim-survivor, suggested that reporting should be proportional with the reality of sexual violence statistics:

Report just as much, proportionally, make sure that the amount of times that you report the people who lie about being raped or sexually assaulted and you know they get a conviction or something for wasting police time or something like that, that you should, that that could be balanced with the amount of times that seems to actually really happen in real life with the same amount of reporting so that it comes across as a minimal problem rather than the way it does right now which is kind of quite a big deal and I think there's too any people going around thinking 'oh that must happen all

the time' and I really don't think it does, so I think they need to be better at representing the reality I suppose. (Jessica, victim-survivor)

Future guidance could therefore be more explicit about the reporting of 'false allegations', taking into consideration the issues that might inflate such numbers, such as unclear police counting practices (Kelly et al., 2005), and an over-reporting by the media of such cases (Jordan, 2004a).

This therefore demonstrates that it is not that media guidelines are necessarily lacking (although there is scope for additions to the NUJ guidance), as both victim-survivors of sexual violence, and practitioners working and volunteering in supporting victim-survivors of sexual violence often suggested that the media change in ways that the guidance suggested, without the guidelines being raised in the interviews. Journalists therefore need to adopt and use the guidance available to them.

## **8.9 - Summary**

This research therefore makes a number of contributions to knowledge, as highlighted within this chapter. Both those who have experienced sexual violence and those who support them identified a number of consequences of the media, including having to disengage with media, not being able to identify that they had experienced sexual violence, or influencing their decision whether to disclose or report the incident. The women interviewed also identified various presentations in the media that they felt were damaging, and this included the presentation of perpetrators in high-profile cases, such as Ched Evans. The media therefore clearly does impact upon women who have experienced sexual violence, and the following chapter will draw together the findings of the thesis.

# Chapter 9 – Conclusion

## 9.1 - Introduction

Previous research has demonstrated that the media is inaccurate in its reporting of violence against women, including sexual violence. It has been found to blame (Benedict, 1992; Lees, 1995; Gillespie et al., 2013; Pepin, 2016), sexualise (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Braber, 2014; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017) and divide victim-survivors into those who deserved rape and those who did not (Estrich, 1987; Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017). As well as this, it creates excuses (including by presenting them as ‘monsters’ and therefore ‘other’) and sympathy for perpetrators of such violence (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Greer, 2003; Kitzinger, 2004; Taylor, 2009; O’Hara, 2012), if they are even made visible to begin with (Taylor, 2009; Meyer, 2010; Waterhouse-Watson, 2013; Braber, 2014). Coverage therefore distorts the reality of many women’s lived experiences of sexual violence (Soothill and Walby, 1991). Until now, there has been less research focusing on how this news coverage affects victim-survivors. This thesis fills that gap.

This final chapter of the thesis will summarise the results from the research, before suggesting areas for future research based on these findings. It will then offer some recommendations, particularly for the press, before reiterating the original contributions to knowledge that the thesis makes. The questions this thesis has answered are:

1. What forms of victim-blaming are present in the media in high-profile sexual violence cases, and how are they resisted?
2. What are the consequences of victim-blaming for women victim-survivors?
3. How do sexual violence support organisations resist these themes or mitigate their impact in their work with women survivors?

## 9.2 - Summary of Findings

This research adopted a mixed method, qualitative approach in exploring the research questions above. This included the use of journalist guidelines to conduct a media analysis of 204 articles reporting upon a high-profile sexual violence case, and two sets of semi-structured interviews. Alongside this, an interview with the creator of the journalist guidelines was also conducted to explore how the guidelines came to be, and the challenges of creating such guidance. The research adopted a feminist understanding of violence against women, with men's violence understood to be 'part of a system controlling women' (Walby, 1990: 3).

The analysis of coverage of the rape retrial of Ched Evans had a number of key findings. Overall, guidelines for journalists for reporting on violence against women were found to not be followed. The language that publications used to describe victim-survivors throughout cases but also *after* a verdict was found to be a concern. With 'accuser' appearing in a quarter of all articles, this represents a way to cast doubt upon victim-survivors in high-profile cases. Similarly, the woman in this case was sexualised in over a quarter of articles, with details of her sexual history reported in great detail, and she was also blamed in over half of the articles included in the sample. There is therefore an issue of how much detail publications draw upon in their coverage of cases. This links into the views of the victim-survivors and Rape Crisis supporters, who overwhelmingly described the coverage of the trial as negative and blaming of the victim in the case, with the volume of such coverage becoming an 'overload' for victim-survivors of rape. Whilst participants who worked or volunteered for Rape Crisis centres would like to challenge such blaming in the media, they acknowledged there was a lack of resources to do so, as well as there being tensions between this work and direct, confidential work with victim-survivors. As well as this, the coverage showed a lack of focus on violence against women, and was a missed opportunity to educate readers about the reality of sexual violence, such as through the use of educational materials and statistics. There was a lack of support information available in the media coverage of the case, which was also noted by victim-survivors, who felt this was important. For example, one victim-survivor suggested that articles include helpline information at the start, rather than at the end, because not every reader who needed support would finish the article. Other suggestions for improved media

coverage of rape from interview participants included more context for stories (particularly when discussing false allegations), and less graphic and sensationalist language.

The consequences of such coverage for victim-survivors was also explored. For two of the victim-survivors interviewed, they described coverage as being like ‘wallpaper’ – constantly present in the background of our lives. Interviewees therefore identified a number of consequences, including victim-survivors being deterred from even identifying their experiences, let alone reporting them. They also identified that seeing how those around them interacted with media could be an issue, especially around high-profile cases, or with media gaining a lot of attention, such as TV shows. With this, victim-survivors were placed into situations where they might have little control over discussion, and put at risk of hearing victim-blaming comments from those around them. However, there were also positive consequences – one victim-survivor identified the early coverage of Harvey Weinstein as facilitating the realisation she had trivialised past experiences, whilst supporters identified that clients had found courage from seeing other victim-survivors in the media. Similarly, social media, whilst often being a source of victim-blaming, was also a site of support for victim-survivors, highlighting that experiences of media are not simplistic. Both victim-survivors and supporters also described their engagement in safety work. This included when challenging victim-blaming, but, for victim-survivors, also covered their engagement with media. For example, participants described limiting their media intake (including temporarily or permanently not engaging with certain formats or sources), setting certain times they would read coverage, or, if available, using other sources or content warnings to decide if they were currently feeling able to engage with media. This highlights that victim-survivors may often still want to engage with media coverage, but want to do so in a way that feels safe and allows them to minimise any harm that may be caused by doing so.

This research therefore builds upon previous work, such as that by Soothill and Walby (1991), which including examining the language used to describe perpetrators, but focused less on the language used to describe victim-survivors. It adds to work that shows coverage focuses on the actions of victim-survivors rather than those of perpetrators, such as that by Benedict

(1992), O'Hara (2012) and Meyer (2010), or creates sympathy for perpetrators (Lloyd and Ramon, 2017; Braber, 2014; O'Hara, 2012). It also contributes to evidence that sportsmen who perpetrate violence are excused or presented as victims themselves (Franiuk et al., 2008a; Waterhouse-Watson, 2012, 2013, 2016a). By using journalist guidelines to examine such coverage, this work therefore builds on the work of others who have examined media coverage of sexual violence (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Benedict, 1992; Kitzinger, 2004; O'Hara, 2012) and adds another example to research examining cases with high-profile perpetrators (Rothman et al., 2012; Harrington, 2016; Boyle, 2018).

Similarly, less was known about the consequences of media coverage upon victim-survivors of sexual violence. Schlesinger et al. (1992) found that women, both with and without experiences of male violence, experienced fear of crime following viewings of programmes, and also identified strongly with women experiencing men's violence in media formats. Kelly (1989) found that participants mentioned flashbacks and feeling sick due to media, as well as having their enjoyment of films and television affected due to their experiences of sexual violence, findings which are backed up by this research. Similarly, Kitzinger (2010) found that victim-survivors of childhood sexual abuse felt that there was a lack of recognition of their abuse in the media, leaving them struggling to identify the abuse, which was discussed by participants in this research. She also found that the strong role model of a character who had been sexually abused as a child in a soap was important to victim-survivors (Kitzinger, 2004). Phillips (2017) meanwhile had quoted from a victim-survivor who described a range of physical sensations after watching *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, including feeling panicked, sick and tense, disassociating and struggling to breathe, similar to the affects described by participants in this research. This research also extends the concept of safety work (Kelly, 2016; Vera-Gray, 2016).

### **9.3 - Areas for Future Research**

The findings above highlight a number of areas that require further research in the future. This includes how such media coverage of cases affects (potential) perpetrators, building

upon *Men Viewing Violence* (Schlesinger et al., 1998). As noted by both Samantha (supporter), who supported a client through a court case where the defendant used similar methods to Ched Evans' legal defence, and Julia (victim-survivor), the media is not only reaching victim-survivors, but those who either already have perpetrated, or may do so in the future. It is therefore possible that their behaviours are validated by the media, and future research needs to explore this, using the work of Schlesinger et al. (1998) as a starting point for such research.

Fictional coverage was raised by both the supports and victim-survivors interviewed. Due to a lack of visibility for victim-survivors in cases in the UK, where victims have a lifetime right to anonymity, it may be that victim-survivors seen within fictional media, such as TV shows, are even more important. This has been highlighted by Kitzinger's (2004) exploration of the character Beth from soap *Brookside* and Schlesinger et al.'s (1992) inclusion of *Eastenders*, but further research could explore this in more depth.

As evidenced in the introduction to this thesis, rates of reported rapes are rising. This has coincided with a period of a high volume of coverage of sexual violence in the media, including of celebrity perpetrators such as Jimmy Savile and, more recently, Harvey Weinstein. There has therefore been an explosion in the amount of coverage of sexual violence. Future research could explore the relationship between this coverage and the increased rates of reporting.

As all of the women interviewed within this research were white, future work in this area should seek to include and explore the experiences of women of colour in relation to the media's coverage of sexual violence, including how their experiences may differ to white women's.

## 9.4 - Implications and Recommendations

There are a number of key recommendations that become clear from the findings of this research. The first of these is that the guidelines put forward by the NUJ need to be utilised by journalists. Individual publications could do this by committing to an internal code of conduct for reporting on issues related to violence against women. As well as this, the existing NUJ guidelines could also be improved, such as by adding guidance around the reporting of false allegations, and how rare these are, and further guidance to prevent usage of terms such as ‘accuser’, which shift the focus onto the victim and away from the perpetrator.

As well as this, the media also has more scope to be working with specialists in the field of sexual violence, including practitioners and academics. Given the limited funding landscape for Rape Crisis Centres, the onus should not be with under-resourced and understaffed support services, and journalists should be the ones taking responsibility to accurately and sensitively report sexual violence. There is also a need for widespread training for journalists, and for this responsibility to not be placed solely on those reporting crimes of sexual violence. Violence against women touches every arena in society, and, as such, may be reported in many different areas of the media, including entertainment and sport. This therefore highlights a need for full and comprehensive training on the reporting of violence against women for *all* journalists.

## 9.5 - Summary

As noted by Kelly (1989: 200), the implications of media coverage on victim-survivors has previously been ‘totally ignored’, although the work of Schlesinger et al. (1992) did consider this. However, this thesis therefore makes a significant contribution to the knowledge by exploring the consequences of the media on victim-survivors in the current context. A number of negative consequences have been highlighted by the research, including impacting on the ability to identify having experienced sexual violence, and a range of emotional and mental affects. However, it is important to note that there were some positives within the coverage – there was some, albeit rare, examples of resistance to victim-blaming in the media analysis,

and, similarly, positive coverage was identified as existing by many of the interview participants. It was however, lacking in the mainstream coverage. As well as this, the media also offered some positive consequences, such as highlighting to victim-survivors that they were not alone in their experiences. Whilst it has acted as a barrier, it also has the potential to aid women to identify having experienced sexual violence. Social media also offers an incredible platform for victim-survivors to resist victim-blaming and offer support and alternative forms of justice for one another. It is therefore important to recognise the duality of the media, with it being both a potential space for bad and for good.

Concluding this thesis, I feel immense privilege to have been able to speak to the women I interviewed. I hope this work does justice to their words, and can evidence the experiences of so many women. The support offered by specialist services is as vital as ever, especially in a period of so many high-profile cases. Whilst I may seem critical of the media overall, I recognise that there are many good journalists who are trying to change how we report sexual violence, and that the media can be a positive force. As such, I hope this thesis can be part of a widespread change and contribute to the elimination of sexual violence for women and girls everywhere.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Previous High-Profile Cases

### Cabral (Adilson Tavares Uarela)

- 1/2015 – alleged rape took place
- 4/2016 – trial took place
- 6/5/2016 – found not guilty

### Ched Evans

- 30/5/2011 – arrested on suspicion
- 26/7/2011 – charged
- 8/8/2011 – preliminary hearings
- 20/4/2012 – verdict given
- 24/4/2012 – appeal announced
- 6/11/2012 – appeal refused
- 7/2014 – new appeal launched
- 22/3/2016 – case heard by court of appeal
- 21/4/2016 – appeal accepted, new trial due in October 2016

### Adam Johnson

- 12/2014-1/2015 – offences take place
- 23/3/2015 – Johnson is arrested
- 23/4/2015 – charged
- 10/2/2016 – trial began
- 2/3/2016 – found guilty
- 24/3/2016 – sentenced to 6 years in prison

### Rolf Harris

- 4/7/2014 – sentenced
- 1/8/2014 – appeal launched
- 14/6/2015 – *Daily Mail* publishes letter with Harris' song lyrics about his victims
- 12/2/2016 – further charges announced
- 9/1/2017 – trial set to start

### Jian Gimeshi

- 26/11/2014 – charged
- 1/2/2016 – trial began
- 24/3/2016 – acquitted
- 6/2016 – trial for another charge

## Appendix 2 - National Union of Journalists Guidelines for Reporting on Violence Against Women



**NUJ guidelines for journalists on violence against women**  
September 2013

The union's national executive council has endorsed this guidance and it has been created in partnership with other organisations.

### Key issues:

- Frame violence against women and girls<sup>1</sup> (VAWG) as a gender equality and human-rights abuses rather than as a "mishap", a "bad relationship" or as the consequence of women undertaking activities that would be unremarkable for men (walking alone, being out after dark, drinking in a bar, etc.).
- In the case of attack that has not resulted in murder, do not use the word "victim" unless the woman self-identifies as one. If she has survived the attack, she is a "survivor".
- Have regard for women as individuals and avoid media reporting which reinforces negative gender stereotypes.
- Take care not to contribute to the sexualisation of women and girls in the media.

### Guidance:

- Include helplines at the end of articles or broadcasts and include all jurisdictions information where appropriate (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, etc.).
- Include more informative and educational materials (e.g. challenging rape myths and misconceptions about the "types" of victim).
- Broadcast warnings before presenting material in which violence against women is to be depicted, especially if reporting sexual violence.
- Name violence against women as violence against women (e.g. domestic violence is not a "volatile relationship"). Do not use the word sex when you mean rape. "Honour" crime should appear in quotes or with "so-called" before it. "Crimes of passion" is not an appropriate way to describe murder.

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<sup>1</sup> VAWG is a collective term for a set of human rights abuses relating to women because they are women (e.g. female genital mutilation) or which disproportionately affect women and girls (e.g. rape). As such it is a description of crime types rather than victims. It includes (but is not limited to: rape, sexual assault, 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, domestic violence, sex trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation).

- Do not blame religion or culture for gender-based violence and do not assume that one religion or culture is more inclined than others. Represent gender-based violence as a cross-cultural phenomenon with no geographical or cultural boundaries.
- Female genital mutilation is a violation of the human and bodily rights of women and girls which is practised in many countries for different stated reasons. It is not circumcision. The word mutilation in itself condemns the practice in the view of the World Health Organisation, which states female genital mutilation includes "all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons".
- When reporting on violence against women working in prostitution, avoid using derogatory language (e.g. hooker).
- Make the perpetrator visible in your report (e.g. women do not "get themselves raped"), it is not domestic violence that "claims the lives of two women a week", it is murder.
- Do not refer to abusers as "monsters", "fiends", "maniacs" or "beasts" as this creates the myth that abusers are noticeably and substantially different from "normal" men.
- Take care not to imply that a survivor of gender-based violence might be somehow, even partially, to blame for the violence she has experienced, nor assume or imply that any of her behaviour might have triggered the abuse or that "she asked for it".
- Avoid treating homicides resulting from domestic violence as inexplicable or unpredictable tragedies simply because the factors which led to the homicide are unknown.
- Avoid comments which could be interpreted as making excuses for the abuser, such as commenting on his remorse, or suggesting that the way women dress or behave incited the incident.
- In general, when presenting stories on rape keep in mind that stranger rapes are rarer than those involving people known to the survivor.
- Use up-to-date statistics and do your research.
- Pay attention to potential risks and the safety of the woman being interviewed (e.g. take care when filming, even if only doing hand shots, her jewellery may be recognisable).

- Consider reporting more fully on the successful prosecutions of those guilty of violence against women, as well as the success many women have had recovering and rebuilding their lives.

**For more information:**

The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

UN women - [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)

World Health Organisation information about violence against women - [http://who.int/topics/gender\\_based\\_violence/en](http://who.int/topics/gender_based_violence/en)

The End Violence Against Women Coalition is a unique coalition of organisations and individuals campaigning to end all forms of violence against women in the UK - <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk>

Women's aid UK - [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

Women's aid Ireland - [www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

Women's aid federation Northern Ireland - [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

Scottish women's aid - [www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)

Welsh women's aid - [www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)

**NUJ ethics:**

The union has always stood for high journalistic standards based on the NUJ code of conduct and the union backs members willing to take a stand for ethical journalism.

NUJ code of conduct: [www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code/](http://www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code/)

The NUJ ethics hotline number is 0845 450 0864 (members only).

Email the NUJ ethics council: [ethics@nuj.org.uk](mailto:ethics@nuj.org.uk)

Email the NUJ equality council: [equality@nuj.org.uk](mailto:equality@nuj.org.uk)

## Appendix 3 – Practitioner Recruitment Poster

# Help needed with research on sexual violence and the media

I'm a PhD researcher at Durham University, and an experienced Rape Crisis volunteer. My PhD research is about how media coverage of cases of rape affects survivors.

I'm looking to interview Rape Crisis counsellors/support workers to talk about your experiences of supporting survivors and how the media reports sexual violence. Interviews will be around 40-60 minutes long, and will be conducted at a time and place to suit you.

**Any identifying information will be anonymised.**

Thank you,

Kathryn Royal

If you would like more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact me

[k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk](mailto:k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk)

Supervisor:

Professor Nicole Westmarland: [nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk](mailto:nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk)



## Appendix 4 – Blank Consent Sheet

This research aims to explore how the victim-blaming and media reporting of rape and sexual assault affects women who have experienced rape. You have been chosen to participate because of your experience [**supporter of women who have experienced sexual violence/ of sexual violence**]. As part of this research, you will be asked to take part in an interview which will ask you about [**whether you have experienced victim-blaming/whether victim-blaming affects the work of you and your organisation**]. You do not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, and you can stop the interview at any point. You can withdraw from the research after the interview, up to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. Participating in the research could cause some distress, although every care will be taken to prevent this, and you may find it beneficial.

Your real name will not be used in the research, and you can choose a name to go by if you would like to. Any identifying information will be anonymised, unless you share something about you or another person being at risk of harm, in which case I may have to act on this information. However, you would be made aware of this. If you work or volunteer at an organisation, this may be named in the research, but you will not be. The data will form part of my PhD research, and may be published. The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secure location, and on a secure computer system. The only people who will have access to these will be myself, and my supervisors.

If you have any questions, or decide you want to withdraw from the research up to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018, please do not hesitate to contact myself via email at [k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk](mailto:k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk). Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor, Professor Nicole Westmarland at [nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk](mailto:nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk).

Please sign below to confirm you consent to taking part in the research.

Yours sincerely,



Kathryn Royal  
[k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk](mailto:k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk)

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I confirm that I consent to taking part in this research

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5 – Supporter Interview Guide

### For Supporters

- Introductions
- Consent and information sheet
- Can pause at any time or not answer questions
- “As you know, I won’t be using your real name when it’s written up, can I ask what you’d like to be called now, and if you’d like to pick a name to go by in the report. If you can’t think of one, I can allocate you one”
- Any questions?

#### **Part A –**

1. Can you tell me a bit about what you do here/your role here? How did you get into it/what is your background? How long have you been here/working in this area?
2. So as you know, this research is about the ways in which ‘victim-blaming’ operates in the media. Can I start by asking what the term ‘victim-blaming’ means to you?
3. What are the ways in which you think the media promotes ‘victim-blaming’? Or challenges ‘victim-blaming’?

#### **Part B –** So moving on to talk about how this ‘victim-blaming’ and coverage affects survivors

1. Do you think media coverage has an impact on women who’ve been raped? How do you think it does this?
2. How have you seen it affect the women you’ve worked with? Can you anonymously share any examples?

#### **Part C –** I’m also interested in the ways we can resist some of these attitudes, so thinking about that

1. Does your organisation challenge ‘victim-blaming’? How do they do this?
2. How do you challenge ‘victim-blaming’ in your role?
3. Do you challenge ‘victim-blaming’ in your private life e.g. when out with friends/family?
4. How do you think we can go about creating change in how rape is reported in the media?

#### **Part D –** Moving on to talk a bit more specifically about the case of footballer Ched Evans:

1. Was there anything about the coverage, good or bad, of Evans’ trial and retrial that you particularly remember/stood out to you?
2. Have the women you work with spoken to you about this case? If yes, what did they say?
3. Did the coverage of this affect how you do your job at all? Did it make it easier/difficult/no difference?

#### **Part E**

1. Is there anything else you would like to share?

2. So final question, if you could change one thing about how the media reports sexual violence, what would it be?

## Appendix 6 – Victim-Survivor Recruitment Poster

# Help needed with research on sexual violence and the media

I'm a PhD researcher at Durham University, and an experienced Rape Crisis volunteer. My PhD research is about how media coverage of cases of rape affects survivors.

I'm looking to interview survivors of rape over the age of 16 to talk about your experiences and feelings about news coverage of sexual violence. Interviews will be around 40-60 minutes long, and will be conducted at a time and place to suit you.

**Any identifying information would be anonymised.**

Thank you,

Kathryn Royal

If you would like more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact me

[k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk](mailto:k.e.royal@durham.ac.uk)

Supervisor:

Professor Nicole Westmarland: [nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk](mailto:nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk)



## Appendix 7 – Victim-Survivor Interview Guide

### For Survivors

- Introductions
- Consent and information sheet
- Can pause at any time or not answer questions
- “As you know, I won’t be using your real name when it’s written up, can I ask what you’d like to be called now, and if you’d like to pick a name to go by in the report. If you can’t think of one, I can allocate you one”
- Any questions?

**Part A** – So as you know, this research is about the ways in which ‘victim-blaming’ operates in the media

1. Can I start by asking if you’ve heard of the term ‘victim-blaming’ before?
2. What does the term ‘victim-blaming’ mean to you?

**Part B** – So moving on to talk about how this ‘victim-blaming’ and coverage affects survivors

1. How do you think media reporting affects women who have been raped?
2. Can you share any examples of when and how it has affected you?

**Part C** – I’m also interested in the ways we can resist some of these attitudes, so thinking about that

1. Can you think of any times you’ve seen ‘victim-blaming’ challenged in the media by journalists etc?
2. Do you try to challenge ‘victim-blaming’ when you see it?
3. Have you seen groups or organisations, like Rape Crisis, challenge ‘victim-blaming’ in the media?
4. How do you think we can go about creating change in how rape is reported in the media?

**Part D** – Moving on to talk a bit more specifically about the case of footballer Ched Evans:

1. Was there any coverage, good or bad, of Evans’ retrial last October that you particularly remember/stood out to you?
2. Do you remember any of this coverage affecting you? If yes, how so?

**Part E**

1. Is there anything else you would like to share?
2. So final question, if you could change one thing about how the media reports sexual violence, what would it be?