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When Public Institutions Betray Women: News Coverage of Military Sexual Violence Against Women 1991-2013

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Women's movement into sectors of society that have previously excluded them can be a cause of triumph. The institutions that receive them, however, often erect further barriers to their participation. This study of the intersection of two such institutions, the military and journalism, explores the nature of news coverage of sexual violence toward women in the military over a 22 year period.

In early 2012 the military lifts a ban forbidding women from serving in combat roles close to the front lines. Previously, women were prohibited from 237,000 roles within the military; the lifting of the ban opens up 14,000 of those positions (Roulo, 2013, January 24). Lifting the ban against women serving officially in direct combat is a step forward to achieving equality between the sexes; still, there are underlying cultural problems within the military that might make this change very dangerous to women.

Sexual assault and rape by U.S. servicemen against female members of the American armed forces have been part of the military culture for decades, only increasing as the number of women servicemembers has expanded. The CDC reports that nearly one out of every five women in the U.S. is raped in her lifetime (Black, et al., 2011); when a woman enlists in the military her odds of being raped increase to one out of three (Benedict, 2008, August 13). Sexual assault is the most common danger female soldiers face, even during times of war. In a piece for the LA Times and later at a house panel, former Representative Jane Harman reveals that a woman is more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire (Harman, 2008, March 31). Harman quotes a doctor at a veteran's hospital as telling her in 2008 that 41% of his female patients had been raped by a fellow soldier (CNN, 2008, July 31).

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) estimates that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 (October 2011 to September 2012), approximately 26,000 active-duty servicemembers (11,600 females or 6.8% of 202,876 active-duty females, and 14,400 males or 1.8% of 1.2 million active-duty men) were victims of sexual violence

committed by their fellow soldiers (DOD Annual Report, 2012). The DOD states that 3,374 soldiers reported sexual assault; of that number, the DOD estimates that about 60 percent involved servicemember on servicemember crime. This report resembles many DOD reports before it: in FY 2011, 3,192 soldiers reported assault; in 2010, 3,158 soldiers; and in 2009, 3,230. Moreover, institutional reporting practices mean these numbers likely are below the actual victimization rates; the DOD estimates that in 2012 only 11% of all sexual assaults and rapes are reported (DOD Annual Report, 2014).

These reports begin in 2004, but it isn't until the 2012 report that members of the U.S. Congress are motivated to take significant action. In April of 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announces a change in the adjudication of military sexual crimes. The change requires local unit commanders to report alleged rape, forcible sodomy, and sexual assault to a special court-marshal convening authority (Daniel, 2012, April 16). Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, who led a congressional effort to amend the Uniform Code of Military Justice, argues during the 2013 Joint Chiefs of Staff interrogation by Congress, with the support of a bi-partisan group that included Senator Mitch McConnell and Senator Ted Cruz, that the military has not lived up to its promises over the years to end an epidemic of sexual violence in the U.S. military, and that it lacks the will and the ability to do so (U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, 2013). Gillibrand's Military Justice Improvement Act of 2013 proposes to expand Panetta's change in policy by removing entirely the military chain of command from the adjudication process, and putting sexual violence cases into the hands of independent military prosecutors (Congress.gov, 2013, May 16). The Military Justice Improvement Act fails in 2014 (Cooper, 2014).

Both Panetta and Gillibrand state that it is not the DOD reports, nor newspaper reporting that motivate them to take action, but the documentary *The Invisible War* (Ziering, et al., 2012), released in January of 2012 at Sundance Film Festival.

The Invisible War (TIW) features interviews with military rape survivors, journalists, military and government officials, and mental health professionals. The film reveals that because 80% of rape survivors do not report, the reported 3,000 sexual assaults are just a fraction of the total number of assaults. Amy Herdy, an investigative producer of the film, estimates that half a million women have likely been sexually assaulted by fellow officers in the U.S. Military (Ziering, Barklow, & Dick, 2012).

Sexual violence in the U.S. military has been a part of the armed forces for many years. The U.S. military and the American media system represent two of the most powerful institutions of our time. While the release of *TIW* brings military sexual crimes to the attention of legislators and the public in 2012, the question arises as to the efficacy of earlier news reports in bringing attention to the problem. In order to learn about carefully guarded institutions like the military, most Americans rely upon news media to gain access and information (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). In other words, if the media are not talking about an issue, Americans are not likely to know that an issue exists.

Our study seeks to shed light on the institutional failure of the military to halt sexually abusive practices toward women in the armed forces by exploring another powerful institution: that of mainstream news media organizations and the role they play in bringing military abuses to light. It does so by conducting a content analysis of newspaper reports of military sexual violence over a 22-year period, from 1991 (beginning with the Navy Tailhook Convention sexual scandal in which hundreds of men were discovered to have engaged in sexual harassment and assault of women) through the first six months of 2013. The focus is on traditional newspapers in order to create a consistent dataset for analysis from a pre-Internet, pre-digital time to the present. A content analysis of 1,955 newspaper articles examines two overarching areas of interest. We look to the volume of newspaper reporting on military sexual violence during the 22-year period in order to understand the

degree to which the issue of military sexual assault is present in the media's agenda. We also look at what characterizes the content and reporting style of news articles on military sexual assault and rape during those same years to discern how clearly the subject is communicated to readers and to look for institutionalized differences within the media coverage on this topic. We discuss our results with the understanding that media are both reflections of and contributors to dominant social beliefs and values.

What is Known about Military Sexual Violence

The DOD estimates 200,000 women were assaulted before 1991 (Ziering, et al., 2012). *TIW* contends that officials of the U.S. armed forces strategically attempt to dismiss and downplay their institutions' involvement in sexual assault and rape within their ranks. Victims are frequently forced to report their rape to the commander who raped them, and instead of punishing the predators, survivors of rape are frequently given disciplinary or psychiatric discharges as punishment for accusing their attackers.

The Navy's Tailhook convention in 1991 is one of the first military sexual scandals to become a major news stories, covered by national news media. In response to this event and its entry into public awareness, military officials claim systemic efforts would be made to eradicate military sexual violence and to better protect women from such atrocities. In October 2004, the DOD under Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld establishes the Joint Task Force for Sexual Assault Prevention and Support Centers. In October 2005, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) becomes the official unit born out of the efforts of the Task Force. Its mission states that it "prevents and responds to crimes of sexual assault in order to enable military readiness and reduce—with a goal to eliminate—sexual assault from the military" (DOD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response,

2014, para. 2). That goal is not realized. The DOD issues annual reports on sexual assault in the military beginning in 2005. The fiscal year 2013 annual report features a chart showing the number of *reported* cases of sexual violence, increasing from 1,700 in 2004, to 2,974 in 2006, to 5,061 reports in 2013 (DOD Annual Report, 2014).

To estimate *unreported* cases, the DOD uses the Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members (WGRA) anonymous survey to assess the prevalence of sexual violence over the course of a year. The 2012 WGRA report finds 66% of women who indicate experiencing military sexual assault do not report to either a civilian or a military authority or organization (p 73). A fear of retaliation, and the perception that nothing would be done to stop the perpetrators, function as the greatest barriers to reporting by victims, contributing to only 11% reporting in 2012 (DOD Annual Report, 2014). A 2003 study finds that 25% of military rape survivors refuse to report their rape because their ranking officer is their rapist, and 33% refuse to report their rape because their superior (almost always a male) is friends with their rapist (Sadler, et al., 2003).

Even when a rape is reported, rapists are rarely punished. The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) briefing paper submitted to the DOD shows that of the 3,192 sexual assaults and rapes reported in 2011, only 191 perpetrators are convicted (SWAN, 2012). The DOD 2013 annual report lists a conviction rate of 370 cases out of the 5,061 reported (DOD Annual Report, 2014).

Theoretical Frameworks, Research Questions and Hypotheses

Journalists rely upon, and give deference to, official sources for information that is difficult to obtain about the internal workings of institutions (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In the case of the U.S. armed forces, this journalistic reliance means

newspapers are often reissuing official press releases that have not been investigated independently. This institutionalized structure makes it difficult and even impossible at times for the reporters, let alone the general public, to learn about issues within the military.

Agenda-setting theory (AS) attempts to describe the importance of media attention (or lack thereof) regarding specific topics (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). AS describes how information providers signal which topics are important for their audiences to think about. News reporters signal issue importance in a number of ways, including headline size, location of the article (above or below the middle fold), and article length.

On the macro-level, the frequency with which a topic is discussed in the media indicates in AS how important that issue is to the media (i.e., the issue is higher on the media agenda; Hurley, et al., 2014). Topics that receive a lot of coverage indicate to audiences that these issues are the most important for them to consider, think on, or converse about with their friends. The converse is also true. When coverage of a particular issue is minimal, AS suggests that the issue appears unimportant (i.e., low on the media agenda). Some evidence exists indicating that frequency of coverage impacts public perceptions of an issue. Hurley (2014) argues that certain cancers (e.g., breast cancer) are proportionally overrepresented in news coverage about cancer; these types of misrepresentations appear to be related to public perceptions of differing cancer rates (Jensen, et al., 2014).

Tracking the number of articles available that discuss sexual assault in the U.S. military will provide insight into the relative importance news reporters ascribe to this issue over time. AS suggests that the frequencies of articles on a particular topic indicates, in a number of ways, the relative importance of that topic. In the case of military sexual assault, if reports in the news are minimal, AS suggests that the public will not be aware of or think much about the issue of sexual assault in the military. Low coverage numbers, in other words, will indicate the

attribution of low importance to the issue of sexual assault in the military.

For this study, the following research questions are posited, all with one overarching goal: How do the actions of the U.S. media system play a role in the ongoing sexual victimization of women servicemembers?

RQ1: How did news coverage (or lack there of) maintain public attention to the problem of assault on U.S. women servicemembers over time?

H1a: The quantity of stories per year about sexual violence in the military will increase significantly in years with major sexual assault scandals.

Second-level agenda setting discusses the idea that media can, in fact, impact how we think about some topics depending upon the characteristics of the news information (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Second-level agenda setting, and framing, understood as journalists “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Entman, 2003, p. 417), are intimately related. Both second-level AS and framing claim that journalists’ choices impact how information is interpreted. In other words, the way content is presented to the newsreader can impact how that reader understands that content. For example, Nelson, et al. (1997) found that framing a KKK rally in terms of free speech, as opposed to a focus on their goals of racial fear and intimidation, led to increased tolerance for rallies by newsreaders. Similarly, AS scholars use content analyses and survey data to link journalists’ choices regarding images of politicians and voters’ perceptions of presidential candidates (Becker & McCombs, 1978).

Both second-level AS and framing indicate that general article attributes and characteristics link to effects upon media consumers. Explicit mentions of the gender of victim and perpetrator, in reports of military sexual violence, influences

people's perceptions of the typical gender of sex crime victims and perpetrators. The DOD finds in 2012 89% of all attackers in completed investigations of unrestricted reports to be male, 3% female, and 8% remain unidentified (DOD Annual Report, 2014). In news reports, it would be informative to note if gender is mentioned in close proximity to the statement of sexual impropriety. The traditional and preferred "who, what, when, why, how" structure of journalism dictates that facts about the identity of a subject in a news story would closely link together with statements about the sexual crime to provide optimal clarity. In other words, for the newsreader to acquire a realistic view of military sexual violence, stating the gender of victim and predator in close proximity to the crime committed is needed.

RQ2a: How frequently are females and males explicitly described as being victims and perpetrators of sexual assault, in articles about sexual violence in the U.S. military?

RQ2b: How frequently are females and males explicitly described as being victims and perpetrators of sexual assault, in articles about sexual violence in the U.S. military within close proximity to the statement of sexual violence?

Information about the occupations and locations of victims and perpetrators could also affect reader comprehension. The presence or absence of explicit connections in a news story between serving in the U.S. armed forces and sexual violence are worthy of measurement.

RQ3: How frequently do newspaper articles about sexual assault in the U.S. military explicitly state that a victim or a perpetrator of a sex crime is a servicemember of the U.S. military?

Though journalists have developed alternative structures in reporting on news events, the inverted pyramid is the common syntactical structure used in most hard news articles (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Essentially, columnists employing the inverted pyramid present the most pertinent information as early in the article as possible, to keep people reading and to avoid important material being subjected to any last-minute length cuts before going to print (Brooks, et al., 2013). This choice indicates to the reader the importance of particular pieces of information within the article: critical terms, related to the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of a story, appear in the headline or first few paragraphs of an article. Measuring the location within a news report of critical sexual violence terms, including their first appearance, offers insight into how military sexual violence is characterized in newspaper articles. Deviations from commonly employed journalistic styles (e.g., the inverted pyramid) in a majority of articles might indicate the de-emphasis of critical information within news reports, creating a de-emphasis of the problem of assault on women in the military in the perceptions of newsreaders.

RQ4: Will critical sexual violence-related terms be more frequent in the headline, first three paragraphs, or in the remainder of an article about sexual crimes in the U.S. military?

Despite that journalism schools were producing almost equal numbers of male and female graduates, women made up only 37% of newspaper staff in 2013; the percentage was the same as it was in 1999, showing no improvement over 14 years. (Klos, 2013). In addition, women are less likely to be given the task of writing front page hard news stories, and the majority of quoted sources, even in stories concerning women’s issues (i.e. abortion, birth control, women’s rights) are male (Klos, 2013). Therefore, the majority of stories and opinions we read are from a

male perspective; this study investigates whether or not this gender imbalance influences the manner in which military rape is discussed in the news. Reporting difference in news about military sexual assault could indicate issues within the media institution regarding the treatment of women.

RQ5: Will articles with female authors differ from those that do not explicitly have female authors?

Considered together, the answers to these research questions about media coverage of military sexual assault should shed some light on issues facing women in two of the largest institutions in the U.S.

Method

A content analysis was developed to examine trends and characteristics of newspaper reporting of sexual violence in the U.S. military for evidence of institutionalized problems regarding the treatment of women. This section details the sample, sampling methods, coding procedures, and variables employed in this quantitative content analysis, before presenting the results and their implications.

Sample

Twenty-two years of newspaper articles about sexual crimes in the U.S. military from 21 different newspapers across the country were sampled and analyzed from the years 1991-2013, resulting in a dataset of 1,955 total articles about military-on-military sexual crimes. The newspapers employed in this analysis were selected because they represent a diversity of outlets based on geographical location, journalistic approach, and circulation totals. The goal was to gather newspapers with

large circulations and to include a number of local newspapers with smaller circulations in order to represent a diversity of geographic locations across the U.S. Newspapers representative of what the majority of Americans across the country read were gathered, with some limitations, in particular those related to budget restrictions making certain newspaper aggregation tools unavailable which limited access to some important newspapers such as *The Los Angeles Times*. The list of newspapers, their circulation totals, and their location can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Circulation Statistics for Sampled Newspapers (Editor & Publisher, 2014).

Newspaper Outlets	City/State	Daily	Saturday	Sunday
USA Today	National	2,862,229	N/A	N/A
Wall Street Journal	National	2,273,767	2,301,398	2,301,398
NY Times	National	1,897,890	1,895,247	2,391,986
New York Post	New York, NY	576,711	528,883	525,794
NY Daily News	New York, NY	467,110	417,982	534,295
The Washington Post	National	431,521	436,331	623,979
The Denver Post	Denver, Colorado	393,028	415,899	508,231
Houston Chronicle	Houston, TX	323,429	314,450	475,627
Star Tribune	Minneapolis, MN	300,495	264,956	518,892
Dallas Morning News	Dallas, TX	262,490	252,417	368,112
Chicago Sun Times	Chicago, IL	258,172	235,489	255,522
Philadelphia Inquirer	Philadelphia, PA	258,127	233,249	433,855
Baltimore Sun	Baltimore, MD	139,094	223,366	275,782
Omaha World Herald	Omaha, NE	125,470	124,424	157,375
Virginian-Pilot	Norfolk, VA	124,381	113,798	153,787
The Oklahoman	Oklahoma City, OK	112,225	98,352	160,910
The Post and Courier	Charleston, SC	77,433	70,713	86,259
The News Tribune	Tacoma, WA	66,094	63,598	85,241
The Gazette	Colorado Springs, CO	56,598	56,732	72,835
Fayetteville Observer	Fayetteville, NC	45,085	45,664	56,548
Ledger-Enquirer	Columbus, GA	27,393	27,155	35,974

In order to capture all relevant news concerning U.S. military sexual assault, a combination of search terms (military AND sex* OR rape*) was used within various search engines for news, including News Bank/America's News, Summon, EBSCO's Newspaper Source Plus, LexisNexis, and Google News. The search pulled articles that contained the key terms in any order in the headlines, summary, or body of the article. An asterisk was included after the search terms sex and rape, without quotations (which would have severely limited results). The searches pulled articles that contained any form of the words (e.g., sexual, sexy, sex, sexton, sexiast, heterosexual, raped, rapist) located separately or adjacently anywhere in the article. This resulted in articles about a variety of related topics such as: military sexual harassment, military sexual crimes, military sexual trauma, and military rape, among many articles unrelated to this study. Data collectors read each article (in the range of 4,000-6,000 articles), to determine whether it contained any mention of military sexual crimes and to avoid collecting any false positives (Soothill & Grover, 1997). All irrelevant articles were omitted from the data collection. Initially, many additional searches were included for other related keywords, such as sodomy, Army, Marines, Air Force, Navy, soldier, and so on, but as no additional articles were found, that method was discontinued about halfway through data collection.

Data collectors only included articles that discussed military-on-military sexual violence in the sample. For example, if a military sexual crime was reported, but the article did not specify that the victim was military personnel, that news report was not included in the sample. If the article reported that a military sex scandal had been uncovered at a military academy or base without an explicit identification of the rank or affiliation of perpetrators or victims, the report was included in the sample.

Sampling was capped at ten articles per newspaper, per year, for practical coding considerations. This ceiling, however, was reached only in 2012 and 2013,

which meant the sample collected from 1991 to 2011 more closely represents a census of available articles on military sexual assault and rape from those years and newspapers. In the few instances the cap was reached, data collectors selected the capped ten articles through a search of the key terms. The results of the searches were organized by relevance and the ten articles were randomly pulled from the search results. This method was selected to keep the collection of a large dataset within a reasonable timeframe. In 2012 and 2013, for example, searches

did pull hundreds to thousands of articles, many of which were false positives that needed elimination.

Coding Procedures

Two human coders were employed to read all of the news articles sampled about military-on-military sexual crimes. Coders practiced coding using non-sample articles, and, when confident reliability could be attained, both coders read and coded the majority of the 2012 sample articles ($n = 83$; 4% of the final sample). After reliability was established, the remaining years of the sample were randomly divided in half between the two coders to read and apply this study's measures. Krippendorff's Alpha was used to calculate all reliabilities, which are presented in text below with each variable's description. All alphas ranged from .66 to 1.0 and all variables were coded at the story level.

Victim and perpetrator. Though all articles in the sample were about military-on-military sexual assault and rape, the coders determined whether both a specific victim and a perpetrator were identified within the article as members of the U.S. military. Conceivably, an article about military-on-military sexual attacks could be less than explicit about such connections (e.g., discuss the incident as taking place on a military base but not mentioning that those involved were servicemembers). Coders

also determined whether the gender of the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) was presented within the article. Coders completed this task with very strong reliability, with alphas ranging from 0.90 to 0.98 across these 4 decisions. Coders also identifies whether victim and perpetrator gender and service membership was mentioned within two sentences adjacent to misconduct statement, and did so reliably for victim gender ($\alpha = 0.81$), perpetrator gender ($\alpha = 0.85$), and military membership ($\alpha = 0.75$) mentions within two adjacent sentences. The sexes of the authors of each article were also reliably recorded as having either zero or at least one identifiably female author ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Specific terms. The analysis specifically looked for the frequency of four critical terms. The critical terms employed for this project were: rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual trauma. The terms used were consistent with the 1991-2013 versions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (U.S.C.A., Title 10, Subtitle A, Part II, Chapter 47); in the testimony by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to members of Congress, the term sexual assault was used ten times as often as sexual misconduct and sexual contact, and five times as often as sexual harassment (U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, 2013). The term military sexual trauma is used by the Department of Veterans Affairs to refer to any form of sexual assault/abuse (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014), so sexual trauma was also included in this study. Coders recorded both the presence and the location of these terms within each article (e.g., headline, first three paragraphs, and the remainder of the article). The reliabilities of three of the four measures per term (anywhere and the three locations) were acceptable by Krippendorff's (2004) standards (rape, $\alpha = 0.78 - 0.95$; sexual assault, $\alpha = 0.84 - 1.00$; sexual harassment, $\alpha = 0.66 - 0.80$; and sexual trauma, $\alpha = 0.79 - 0.87$). Sexual harassment in the headline ($\alpha = 0.66$) fell just below Krippendorff's acceptable level of .67; therefore, that frequency should be interpreted accordingly.

Results

RQ1 asks how did news coverage (or lack thereof) maintain public attention to the problem of assault on U.S. women servicemembers over time. The frequency of newspaper articles per year, starting with 1991 through mid-2013, was tracked to examine how high on the media agenda this issue was during each sampled year. Table 2 presents the frequency of stories that discuss the issue of U.S. military sexual assault and rape in relation to some well-known military sex scandals.

H1a suggested that the quantity of stories per year about sexual violence in the military would increase significantly in years with major sexual scandals, which, if true, would indicate a fluctuation of importance in the media agenda. This hypothesis is supported for several major scandals using one-variable chi-squares tests to check for significant frequency differences between consecutive years. For example, in 2002 only 19 articles were published in all of the newspapers sampled about sexual violence in the military; however, after a major scandal at the Colorado Air Force Academy the number of articles on the topic increased significantly to 94 in 2003, $X^2(1) = 49.78$, $p < .001$. Articles on the topic stayed steady in 2004 ($n = 73$) and 2005 ($n = 81$), then significantly decreased to 46 in 2006 [$X^2(1) = 9.65$, $p = .002$], and bottomed out again from 43 in 2009 to 23 articles in 2010, $X^2(1) = 6.06$, $p = .01$. Similar coverage jumps are noticeable following Tailhook in 1991 and the Army Aberdeen Proving Ground in 2006 in which 12 drill instructors were convicted of sex crimes. Similarly, the number of articles decreased relatively rapidly after each scandal. The most notable increase in coverage was from 59 articles in 2011 to 233 in 2012 after the direct Congressional challenges to military command adjudication of sexual crimes.

Table 2: Frequencies of Articles about Military Sexual Assaults per Year

	Scandal Year	Number of Articles	% of Total Sample
1991	<u>Tailhook</u>	21	1.1
1992		86+	4.4
1993		79	4.0
1994		96	4.9
1995		59*	3.0
1996	Aberdeen	153+	7.8
1997		173	8.8
1998		124*	6.3
1999		65*	3.3
2000		79	4.0
2001		36*	1.8
2002		19*	1.0
2003	Air Force Academy in Colorado	94+	4.8
2004		73	3.7
2005	First DOD Report on Sexual Assault	81	4.1
2006		46*	2.4
2007		52	2.7
2008		57	2.9
2009		43	2.2
2010		23*	1.2
2011		59+	3.0
2012	<i>The Invisible War</i>	233+	11.9
2013		204	10.4
<i>Total</i>		<i>N = 1955</i>	<i>100%</i>

+Indicates a frequency that is significantly ($p < .05$) larger than the previous year's frequency, denoting a significant *increase* in coverage.

*Indicates a frequency that is significantly ($p < .05$) smaller than the previous year's frequency, denoting a significant *decrease* in coverage.

RQ2a leads to investigations of gender and its connection to those involved in military sexual attacks. Of the victims presented in this sample, 51% ($n = 998$) of articles contained female victims only, 1% ($n = 20$) contained male victims only, and 9.4% ($n = 184$) of articles presented both males and females as victims. Perpetrators in these articles were identified as 45.8% ($n = 896$) male only, 0.5% ($n = 9$) female only, and in 2.3% ($n = 44$) of the articles both genders were portrayed as perpetrators of sexual crimes. 38.6% of victims and 51.4% of perpetrators were coded as not having a clear connection to gender. RQ2b asked how many of the gender mentions would be adjacent to the sexual impropriety statement. These data suggested that 507 articles (506 male perpetrators and 1 female), or 53% of the 949 mentioning a perpetrator's gender, did so in an adjacent sentence. Of the 1,202 mentioning the gender of the victim anywhere, 58% ($n = 694$) did so in an adjacent sentence.

RQ3 asks about the frequencies regarding explicit statements that a victim or a perpetrator of a sex crime was a member of the U.S. military, even though all articles in this sample were verified to be about military-on-military sexual assault. The data suggests that not all sampled articles contained *explicit* statements linking U.S. military members to those involved in the sexual crimes. In this sample, 23.4% ($n = 458$) of perpetrators were never explicitly linked to membership in the U.S. military. Furthermore, 25.8% ($n = 504$) of victims in these sampled newspaper articles were not explicitly linked to a specific branch of the U.S. armed forces.

RQ4 asks if critical sexual violence-related terms would be more frequent in the headline, first three paragraphs, or in the remainder of an article about sexual assault in the U.S. military. Table 3 presents the frequencies of the aforementioned sexual assault terms. Using chi-square tests, the findings suggest that most terms were significantly more likely to make their first appearance toward the end of articles.

Table 3: Frequency of Critical Sexual Assault Terms

	Headline	First 3 Paragraphs	Rest of Article	Totals	χ^2	p -value
Rape-all	286	698	891	1,875	305.61***	< .001
1st mention	286	446	369	1,101	34.89***	< .001
Sexual Assault-all	413	819	1,205	2,437	386.17***	< .001
1st mention	413	461	460	1,334	3.38	.18
Sexual Harassment-all	61	297	510	868	348.69***	< .001
1st mention	61	244	343	648	189.53***	< .001
Sexual Trauma-all	12	31	122	165	125.71***	< .001
1st mention	12	23	100	135	102.18***	< .001

Note. A single-variable chi-square test was used to determine significant differences in mentions of specific terms between the headline, first three paragraphs, and rest of the article in all sampled papers. Chi-squares were conducted using the frequencies for all mentions and first mentions of unwanted sexual misconduct terms. Significant differences are in bold.

For example, mentions of rape increased as the article progressed with 286 mentions in the headline, 698 in the first three paragraphs, and 891 in the rest of the article. In other words, readers were more likely to only read the term rape toward the end of an article. This pattern was consistent across all terms when considering all mentions and first mentions of each term, save one exception. When all mentions of sexual assault and rape were counted, the pattern of increasing presence was maintained. The only exception in these data was with first mentions of the term *sexual assault*, where there was no significant difference in frequencies between the headline, the first three paragraphs, and the rest of the article.

RQ5 explores whether differences would arise as a result of the gender of the authors. These data suggest that articles with at least one identifiable female author did not differ from those without in terms of reporting perpetrator gender [$\chi^2(1) = 1.46, p = .23$]; however, a significant difference was discovered between female-authored articles and the rest concerning victim gender. Articles with at

least one identifiable female author were more likely to report the victim's gender in sentences adjacent sentences, $X^2(1) = 5.76, p = .02$.

Discussion

The findings of this content analysis indicate that the frequency of coverage surrounding military sexual crimes followed a clear pattern from 1991 to 2013, with the least amount of total yearly coverage across all sampled newspapers being 21 articles in 1991, 19 articles in 2002, and 23 articles in 2010. There were years when the number of news articles sharply increased, following major sexual scandals. In subsequent years, significant drops followed the increases of the previous year, seeming to indicate that military sexual assault and rapes were limited to that specific scandal at that particular installation. This pattern of intense coverage followed by inattention might be seen to contribute to the lack of public perception of a growing epidemic of sexual violence within the U.S. armed forces.

According to AS, this waxing and waning in the frequency of articles would likely mean that the importance of this issue to the public would increase and decrease similarly. Unfortunately this prediction cannot be tested, as obtaining public opinion data about military sexual assault for every year from 1991 would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Still, with sexual assault receiving widespread news media attention only after sex crimes incidents in the military become too numerous to cover up, AS's conclusions hold that the public would (1) only think about the issue in scandal years, (2) would think about sexual assault in the military as merely intermittent scandals, and 3) would think that the commanders of scandal-ridden military bases and academies had eliminated the problem. Both media and military institution should take action to maintain more steady coverage of military sexual abuse in hopes to maintain awareness of this ongoing problem.

The results of the second research question show that a significant proportion of articles did not include explicit identifications of victim and perpetrator gender (38.4% of victims and 51.4% of perpetrators unidentified). Furthermore, when gender of the victim or perpetrator is mentioned, it is frequently distanced from major statements about the sexual impropriety that occurred. The DOD 2013 Annual Report estimates that 89% of perpetrators were male and 3% female, yet this content analysis finds perpetrators to be identified explicitly by gender in only 48.6% of the military sexual crimes reported in newspapers. The researchers of this study posed this research question in an attempt to shed light on how newspaper stories on military sexual violence provoke and sustain public outcry. Gender identifiers used in news stories are one of the means in which subjects are brought to life. When significant identifiers of gender are absent, the reality of the news story about rape and sexual assault by servicemen of servicewomen is undermined. What is a shocking actuality of U.S. military life becomes an abstraction that is easier to ignore or even dismiss, a tendency that could be compelling when such phenomena conflict with national sentiment.

The third research question finds that a significant proportion--twenty-five percent--of news articles in the dataset did not contain explicit statements linking rank or branch affiliation of perpetrators or victims. Those reports commonly used descriptions such as, "sexual assault scandal at a military unit," rather than explicit mentions of perpetrators' and victims' membership in specific branches of the armed forces. Like the analysis of the presence or absence of gender identifiers above, these results suggest that stories about sexual assault are often times confusing and present an abstract rather than concrete view of the attacks. The vagueness of the reporting could be seen as helping to perpetuate a climate of disregard of the devastating condition of thousands of women serving their country.

Cultural myths and misperceptions of sexual assault and rape might make the concept of military rape by military males highly discordant, for both journalists

and the public. Since reports of civilian rape often skew toward the misconception that rapes of girls and women are perpetrated by strangers, rather than intimates (Heath et al., 1981), the prospect of men of the U.S. Armed Forces perpetrating rape on women who are fellow servicemembers and therefore tightly bonded with them could also be subject to obfuscation.

These sets of findings suggest that the majority of news stories on military sexual violence within the period 1991-2013 were subject to the type of journalistic framing Entman (2004) described as culturally resonant. Cultural resonance uses words and images dominant throughout the culture, and which therefore have the greatest success in stimulating a particular response to a reported event. The greater the cultural congruence achieved when a frame's words and terms matches the schemas, or cognitive interpretive processes customarily used by members of society, the greater the likelihood it has in setting the interpretive frame that dominates the political culture. Those events or issues that are in sharp *conflict* with dominant schemas, however, can impede the dissemination of dissonant ideas: "Responses to incongruent stimuli, rather than spreading along 'logical paths,' cause a kind of mental short circuit, a detour that steers thinking down psychologically comforting pathways. Sometimes the easiest response is to ignore the matter altogether" (p. 14).

The prospect that some American men in the military were preying on women who were fellow servicemembers would fit into the category of incongruent stimuli, and not be a comfortable fit with certain perceptions of military life that emphasize a powerful bond among troops. Having to report, as well as absorb, the possibility that the U.S. heroes of the armed forces fighting in the Persian Gulf and Iraq and Afghanistan wars did not always live up to their portrayal as self-sacrificing and dedicated to the protection of those less capable of defending themselves, could be seen to have posed difficulties for both the reporters and the public.

It is also important to reflect on what level of detailed information might-- or might not—be available to news organizations. Parallel to newspaper coverage of civilian rape, in which the police stories were the primary source of cases and details for crime reporters (Sheley & Ashkins, 1981), journalists have relied significantly on military institutional coverage of military rape and sexual assault. The absence of explicit identifiers of gender or rank could be reflective of their absence in military press releases about sexual scandals.

The fourth research question of the content analysis pursues the inclusion and placement of the important “who, what, when, where, why and how” details of newspaper stories. The coding of the data found that a significant proportion was subject to a “buried lead;” that is, important information, if it was present, was included beneath the critical first three paragraphs of a news article.

A hard news article from the study’s sample, titled “Scandals Prompt Naval Academy to Seek Help” (Reuters, 1996 May 14), is an example of a news report that buries important information about military sexual assault. In the first paragraph, the article, printed in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, states, “The U.S. Naval Academy, its reputation tarnished by a series of student scandals, said Monday that it has hired a private consultant to ‘examine the quality of life at the 151-year old military college.’” Not until the fifth paragraph did the reporter detail the military scandals—the sexual attack of four female cadets--that prompted this new hire. The sexual assaults were not mentioned again. The remainder of the article focused primarily on policy remedies offered by the Naval Academy. While such an article would be acceptable if there were many others that provided details of the crimes committed, the current study’s database shows that only nine articles were published on military sexual crimes in the *Chicago Sun-Times* for the entire year.

A number of sampled articles about sexual crimes, like the previous example, focused on remedies the military put forth to rectify the problems, not on the

inherent problems themselves. *The New York Times* reported on the 2003 revelations by Air Force officials of years of rape of cadet women at the Air Force Academy in a hard news article titled, “Academy’s Top General Apologizes to Cadets” (Janofsky, 2003, April 1). The bulk of the article reported statements by high-ranking Air Force officials on the ouster of the superintendent of the Academy, and on the actions those officials and members of Congress proposed to eliminate the problem. Only in the 12th and last paragraph did the article return to the sexual crimes themselves, and the aftermath for the women assaulted. It reported that nearly five dozen women over the years had complained that cadets (unidentified by gender) raped or assaulted them, and that their complaints had resulted either in no investigations by Air Force authorities, or in the women themselves being retaliated against for reporting the incidents.

The emphasis on military authorities’ policy remedies could again imply that armed forces commanders had the problem well in hand. Dismissals of claims of sexual crimes, and reprisals against those who reported, were systematic, strategic, and institutionalized responses by military commanders and Pentagon officials over many years, during which the sexual violence in their midst was ultimately revealed to be of epidemic proportions, affecting tens of thousands of troops.

Burying the lead in hard news stories in ways that repeatedly break the time-honored journalistic code to print the most important information at the beginning, could express to readers that the information included at the end of the article, if they read that far, was not what they needed to think about. In other words, the public encountered the phenomenon of U.S. military sexual assault in the most marginalized and indirect of terms, naming neither perpetrators nor even all the victims, such as military men. Framing the stories with an emphasis on military authorities’ policy remedies, rather than the buried facts of victim retaliation, implied that armed forces commanders had the solution to the problem and that military sexual

violence was contained and diminishing. The structure of the news story implied that the public needed to give little further thought to such a dissonant subject.

When considering female authorship of these articles (RQ5), some reporting trends in these articles differ, suggesting that the gender of the author(s) matters when reporting on this particular topic. For example, female reporters were significantly more likely to report the gender of the victim in sentences adjacent to major statements of sexual assault. This is a helpful practice that allows the reader to better understand the nature of the crime that was committed. Considering that the majority of victims were female, it begs the question as to why articles without an identifiable female author are more likely to distance the victims' gender from these sexual assault statements. The implications of this distancing are worthy of future study, but could lead to a disconnect between the action and the gender of the victim in these articles.

Future research directions might include interviews conducted with many of the journalists who wrote stories in the dataset, to highlight reporter decision-making, as well as the informational and institutional constraints on journalists' choices in reporting on military sexual assault. This work could expand the parameters of this study to encompass television news and social-media networking sites, and track appearances of other media attention to military sexual violence, including entertainment.

Further research directions might also compare the coverage of foreign military personnel actions with U.S. troop behaviors. Rape against women is expressed as a weapon of war when the reporting covers other national military conflicts. How that expression, which is never used in regard to rape by U.S. military men or U.S. military women, could be applied domestically is worthy of study.

Another possible avenue to explore is that of further similarities between the reporting of military and civilian sexual assaults. The military trains its personnel to consider the armed forces a family, a band of brothers; loyalty among troops

and to the unit is among their highest values (Morris, 1996). Charging an officer or fellow troop member with a sexual crime could be regarded as breaking the sanctity of loyalty to the family unit. Many victims of military sexual crimes have cited the failure by fellow troops and commanders to believe and to help them, and stated that the experience of betrayal by that “family” to be worse than the attack itself (Ziering, et al., 2012). If differences in the coverage are found, reluctance by journalists to report on military sexual crimes might be understood in terms of this family value: avoiding reporting intimate and acquaintance rapes, in order to curtail negative reports regarding the family of American soldiers in battle. This exploration would likely extend into the resistance and resentment of many male service-members at the incursion of women into the military brotherhood.

As in all studies, limitations are present. As mentioned above, the dataset and content analysis included news articles only through mid-2013, and this limitation is important to keep in mind when making further interpretations of the data in this report. The current study employed a sampling ceiling of 10 articles per newspaper per year. This method of sampling was employed because of time and budget constraints; however, the only years in which the ceiling came into effect were 2012, and through the first 6 months of 2013. In other words, the dramatic increase in media attention, found after the release of *TIW* and policy challenges and changes, is potentially even more dramatic than reflected in this study.

Though the outlets in this sample are diverse in both circulation and geographic location, a different sampling strategy could yield subtly different results. In addition, it is conventional to calculate reliability scores on at least 5% of the final sample; however, in this project 4% of the final sample was used. This choice was made in response to practical time limitations. Though it diverges slightly from tradition, the reliability sample was reasonably large ($n = 83$), and a larger number would likely only increase the reliability scores. Still, this choice warrants noting.

Also, the reasons behind the placement of sexual assault terms could be impacted by many editorial decisions not accounted for herein, making it important for future content analytic work to include interview data from media professionals to further clarify journalistic choices regarding this, and many other, issues. Finally, one reliability score of the four regarding sexual harassment ($\alpha = 0.66$) fell almost exactly upon Krippendorff's cut off for acceptable reliabilities of 0.67. This fact should not significantly impact how these data are interpreted, but it is worthy of note.

Conclusion

The media serve as a communication bridge between the public and institutions, such as the military, which closely monitor what information is released outside their confines. This study explores both the volume of news stories and the detailed characteristics of the content of newspaper coverage of military sexual violence against women over the years 1991-2013. The content analysis finds that the volume of news stories rose and fell with the release of information about sexual scandals at military bases and academies. The analysis of the content finds that a significant proportion of news reports omitted details about gender and rank of victims and perpetrators, a tendency that mirrors the manner in which civilian rape articles are reported, and that diverge considerably from reports on other crimes, such as murder and non-sexual assaults. In addition, the structure of the news stories tends to place details of the rising sexual violence at the end of the story. Their more prominent availability in the article might serve to bring a sharper focus on the scandal progressing within the military. When information in 2012 and 2013 about the depth and breadth of military sex finally reaches critical

mass, the public response matches the severity of the crimes. Overall, a more consistent journalistic presence toward the epidemic of military sexual violence could provide a powerful brake on its continuation.

In a society in which powerful institutions are afforded the opportunity to police their own boundaries without scrutiny or oversight, an independent force working to unveil corrupt activities is essential. Women servicemembers, whose lives are devastated by ongoing military sexual crimes, deserve the commitment of others to uncover what too long remains hidden. This study finds that women are betrayed by both institutions we examine, the armed forces and the media. Journalism's ability and willingness to investigate military actions—that is, to function in the watchdog role so crucial to a democracy in order to challenge official accounts of military sexual assault and rape—remains a critical factor in the effort to end sexual violence in the U.S. Armed Forces.

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