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# A Feminist Critical Content Analysis: Comparing sexual assault cases published in the Detroit Free Press to reported sexual assaults in Michigan before and after the 2009 discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits

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A Feminist Critical Content Analysis:

Comparing sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* to reported sexual assaults in Michigan before and after the 2009 discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits

by

Nikki A. Basset

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Masters of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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Comparing sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* to reported sexual assaults in Michigan before and after the 2009 discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits

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April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018

## Declaration of Originality

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## Abstract

Rape myths are widely held beliefs that work against victims of sexual assault by attributing blame for their victimization to them. These myths can affect the victim at every stage of criminal proceedings to the extent that treatment informed by these myths can re-traumatize the victim causing even more long-lasting effects on their mental health. The 2009 discovery of approximately 11,000 untested sexual assault kits (SAKs) in Detroit called attention to rape culture which motivated nation-wide and state-level initiatives to engage with the public and dismantle these harmful beliefs. By using this discovery as a pivotal point for rape culture, this research argues that this could have had an effect on news media outlets. This research seeks to understand the representation of sexual assault in print news media by comparing key variables in sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* to sexual assault cases reported to law enforcement in Michigan. The results showed that although the gender of the victim and the location of the assault has become more representative since the discovery of the backlog, the age of the victim, relationship to the accused, and presence or absence of injury have not. This research argues that misrepresentation in news media can contribute to, and reinforce pre-existing beliefs of rape myths among the general populace which can affect the victim's access to legal, medical, and emotional services.

*Keywords:* sexual assault, feminist critical theory, content analysis, news media, rape culture, rape myths, Detroit

For all victims and survivors of sexual assault; I see you and believe you.

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## Introduction

In 2009, just over 11,000 untested sexual assault kits were discovered in a police storage facility in Detroit, Michigan (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 152).

Deindustrialization and the collapse of the auto industry left Detroit in an economic crisis for decades (Martelle, 2012, p. ix-xii). For the police department, chronic resource depletion meant a necessary prioritization of high-profile sexual assault cases and a decrease in empathy for those they did not have the resources to help (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 99). Accumulation of untested sexual assault kits occurred because kits were only tested, and cases were only investigated, if there was a high probability that the case would end in conviction (Spears & Spohn, 1997, 502).

As part of rape culture—a systematic belief system that supports, normalizes, and tolerates sexual violence (Guckenheimer, 2008, p. 581)—cases that have high attrition rates are ones that deviate away from what is considered a “real rape” (Spears & Spohn, 1997, p. 506). “Real rape” is the idea that only reputable victims who were violently attacked by a weapon-wielding stranger in the bushes are telling the truth. This is a rape myth. All rape is real rape. It was found that 71% of the untested sexual assault kits were warehoused because the assault deviated away from what is considered “real rape”, and fault was somehow attributed to the victim (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 160). Following the backlog discovery, nation-wide and state-level initiatives stressed the importance to inform, educate, and engage with the public on victim-blaming (Joyful Heart Foundation, 2018). Unawareness of the harm in victim-blaming by the public contributes to the barriers that victims of sexual assault face when accessing legal services because, after all, jurors are selected from the general public.

In this study, I looked at which sexual assault cases were published in the *Detroit Free Press* in 2008 (pre-discovery) and 2016 (most recent full year since the start of this research) and

compared these incidents to Michigan Incident Crime Reporting (MICR) (2008; 2016) data. I analyzed how rape culture is produced and reproduced within this newspaper through its representation of victims and cases that were considered “newsworthy”. Following the 2009 discovery of the backlog, rape culture and its harmful effects were called to attention by victims, advocates, and activists because of its role in accumulation. Therefore, I hypothesized that since the discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits and the subsequent efforts to address rape culture, the *Detroit Free Press* would have become more representative of all sexual assault cases and not just the ones that could be considered “real rape”. I argue that misrepresentation could perpetuate and maintain rape myths as exposure in news media for only those that conform to “real rape” can leave victims feeling invalid and at fault if circumstances of their victimization deviate away from this. This can be articulated into two research questions:

1. How representative is the *Detroit Free Press* of reported sexual assaults for the years 2008 and 2016?
2. Has the *Detroit Free Press* become more or less representative of reported sexual assault cases since the discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits?

The first chapter, “Framework”, provides an outline of the five principles that make up a feminist critical theoretical framework which will be used as an analytical lens for this research. These principles include issues of objectivity, assumed truths rooted in androcentric and hierarchal knowledge, power within discourse, the limitations of binaries, and the importance of reflexivity and placing the “I” within research. The second chapter, “Context Review”, provides situational background information that locates my research within a specific time and place. I begin with the historical context of rape laws in America, and outline elements of the 1974 rape law reform in Michigan. I reference research that argues that although the reform affected

judicial practice it was not entirely successful in eliminating barriers for victims of sexual assault as internalized rape myths affect the criminal justice system during every stage of proceedings. The discovery of approximately 11,000 untested sexual assault kits in Detroit is tangible evidence of the ways in which these myths are working against victims and survivors of sexual assault. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the different initiatives working at national and state levels who emphasize the importance of educating the public on rape myths as an effective method of eliminating barriers that victims of sexual assault face.

With the framework and situational context of this research established, I then provide the details of my research in the methods, results, and discussion chapters. The “Methodology” chapter begins by stating the value of content analysis and how this method best addresses my research questions. I offer an account of what data was collected, how it was collected, and what means of analysis were used to make sense of and organize these data. Following this is the “Results” chapter which addresses the two research questions for each category of data separately. In this chapter, I assess changes from 2008 to 2016 of key categories of data found in the *Detroit Free Press* and compare it to MICR (2008; 2016) data. This is followed by a “Discussion” chapter that hypothesizes what the effects of these results may be for victims and survivors when they read the *Detroit Free Press* and are exposed to this representation of sexual assault. In the concluding chapter, I offer a summary of the results and discussion as well as the limitations of the study and possible future directions of this research.

### **Terminology**

I have been especially careful with the selection of language for this research as language can both oppress and empower. The term “rape” is only used when it is placed within a historical context or trying to explain concepts such as “rape culture” or “rape myths”. Otherwise, the term

“sexual assault” will be used. Because sexual assault is a crime that can happen to anyone of any gender identity, “women” is only used in a general sense when it is placed in a historical context. Otherwise, gender-neutral pronouns and terms, such as “victim” or “survivor”, will be used. However, I have been careful with the use of the term “survivor” as not all victims of sexual assault survived, and some that have would not self-identify as a survivor. Sexual assault can have long-term effects on the victim, and although they might feel like they are *surviving*, healing processes are different for everyone. Furthermore, it has been important that I use the phrase “their victimization” as opposed to “their assault” as the latter could imply that the victim is at fault. Finally, to distinguish between reporting in news media and reporting to law enforcement, I have used the term “report” exclusive to legal contexts and “publish”, “commentate”, or “articles” when discussing news media.

## Framework

The basic premise of feminism is to achieve the liberation of all marginalized people. However, there is no single feminist research method or methodology to achieve this freedom as all can either be feminist or non-feminist (Letherby, 2003, p. 4). Whether the research is feminist lies within the questions that are being asked, the people who are being centered, and a commitment to social justice. This research is feminist as it places victims and survivors of sexual assault at the center of inquiry. I ask if prejudice exists against those whose victimization deviates away from “real rape” through representation in the *Detroit Free Press*. Adopted explicitly for this research is ‘Feminist Critical Theory’; a method of deconstructing discourse to expose “Other”<sup>1</sup> truths, without privileging any, in an attempt to resist dominant hierarchical power relations and affect social change (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 19). This chapter will explore the five core principles of feminist critical theory as outlined by Gannon & Davies (2007, p. 72-75). Each principle will be defined, explained, and explored in the context of this research.

### **Objectivity must be rethought.**

Traditional knowledge building is rooted in androcentric positivist thinking where value-free and objective research leads to attainable and absolute truth (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p.7). These dominant knowledges subscribe to verification, generalization, objectivity, value-neutrality, and the unity of science (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 143). Feminist critical research rejects these traditional and absolute ways of knowing and calls attention to the partiality and fluidity of truth, situatedness of knowledge, and seeks new ways of knowledge building (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 144). A feminist critical account is partial and open to contestation, so it is

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<sup>1</sup> Historically, the “Other” is anyone who is not a White, able-bodied, middle-to upper-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered male (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 7).

necessarily situated as it is created from somewhere, at some time, about someone, by someone (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 72). Therefore, this research is attentive to the history and processes leading up to the discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits in Detroit and recognizes that what is revealed within this research and how it is analyzed is a partial and incomplete account.

**Skepticism must be paid toward assumed truth and taken-for-granted knowledges.**

Traditional methods of knowledge building have been criticized by feminist critical theorists as hierarchal and deductive as they are laden with power and treat knowledge as something that can, and will be, discovered (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 144). Feminist critical theorists understand power through discourse as something that is oppressive, enacted by dominant groups onto “Other” groups (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 77). As these dominant knowledges are typically androcentric, they exclude the voices of marginalized people by failing to place people’s lived experiences at the center of inquiry (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 6). By doing so, feminist critical researchers may be able to see features of the world that otherwise remain invisible to conventional research and this could, as a result, address social inequality (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 145). Later (see pg. 26), I argue the value of a feminist critical content analysis of print news media as it deconstructs assumed truths through representation that perpetuates, maintains, and reinforces rape culture.

**Relations of power must be understood as established and maintained through discourse and the positions taken up within these particular discourses.**

Feminist critical theorists assert that emancipatory potential lies within the dismantling of the hierarchical relations of power by taking up discursive analyses of oppression (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 77). This requires that the researcher eliminate the boundaries of division that

privilege dominant forms of knowledge and marks who can be a knower and what can be known (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 3). Through this transformative practice, oppressive power relationships and knowledge may be exposed, which would enable the marginalized to gain agency and control over their own lives (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 11). Although this research does not start with the voices of victims and survivors themselves, it looks at their stories told through a dominant and influential print news media outlet. In comparing these publications to reported sexual assault cases in Michigan, my research questions which stories are considered “newsworthy”, why others are not, and who gets to decide this.

**Binaries within discourse limit and constrain modes of thought and possibilities of identity.**

Feminist critical theorists view binaries as harmful categorizations as they do not recognize the multiplicity of difference within dualistic categories (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 74). This research adopts anti-racist intersectional feminism to address differences that are excluded from binaries. Intersectional feminism differs from the other waves of feminism by its deconstructive impulse that challenges the dualisms that construct and naturalize the single and stable identity of what it means to be a man or a woman (Budgeon, 2011, p. 4). Intersectionality is defined by its recognition that gender is shaped by how it interacts with other social categorizations such as race, sexuality, class, age, ability, nationality, and so forth (Merry, 2009, p. 13). Intersectional feminism is critical for this research because sexual assault is gender-neutral, as it can happen to anyone of any gender identity. However, this does not mean that sexual assault is not a form of gender violence. Gender violence is violence whose meaning depends on the gendered identities of the parties involved; it is an interpretation of violence through gender (Merry, 2009, p. 3). Understanding gender violence requires a situated analysis that recognizes the broader social context of gender performances (Merry, 2009, p. 3). The social

context in which this research takes place is one of a patriarchal culture. Within this culture, masculinity is privileged as inherently foundational to other states of being and is reinforced by systems, institutions, and social interactions through normalization (Wunker, 2016, p. 19).

However, patriarchal culture is not only unfair for non-men (cis-women, trans-women, trans-men and non-binary people). Cis-gendered men also experience unfairness under patriarchal culture although these unfairnesses are not the same nor are they experienced in the same way (Wunker, 2016, p. 20). The intersecting social identities of victims affects every interaction beginning with the assault itself all the way through to conviction (if the case gets that far). Therefore, it is necessary to move beyond binaries within gender violence and understand the individual's unique experience within the social context that it occurs.

**Particular attention must be made to the mode of writing.**

Where the first principle requires a feminist critical theorist to situate their research within the context it was produced, this principle requires that the researcher themselves be acutely reflexive of their position within the research. Locating themselves within the written accounts of their research acknowledges that the account should be seen as a representation of reality, and not reality itself, keeping the partiality of the account open to a critical and analytical enquiry (Letherby, 2003, p. 76). Within this research, the first person pronoun "I" will be used as it invites observation from a personal and intimate individuated level (Wunker, 2016, p. 16). "I" locates the researcher's experience as coming from somewhere and being mediated by their social identifiers, and it opens them up to the truth that they do not have access to all experiences (Wunker, 2016, p. 30). I will take this opportunity to be reflexive of my own situated position within the context of this research. First and foremost, as a survivor of sexual assault, my research is motivated by my own experience. The assault was one that did not conform to the



understanding of “real rape”. The perpetrator in question was not a stranger, was not a monster, and did not use violence. This was an instance of coercion and persistence. This made it difficult to recognize, painful to talk about, and impossible to ask for what I needed to heal. Informed by internalized rape culture, I was alone with my experience. This research is for victims and survivors of sexual assault, to show that I see them, believe them, and stand in solidarity with them. I am offering this account to assure victims and survivors that their experience is valid and what happened to them was unacceptable while attempting to dismantle harmful rape culture attitudes that normalize this behaviour. Second, it is important to be reflexive of my social identifiers when I am taking an intersectional approach to understand the experience of victims and survivors of sexual assault. My gender identity has informed much of my survivorship. As someone who identifies as gender non-conforming, I am often erased from discourse and scholarship of sexual assault. As stated previously, sexual assault is a form of gender violence but is not exclusive to a woman’s experience. This made me consider what other marginalized people with intersecting social identities are erased from this discourse. As someone who is white, able-bodied, Canadian, and has access to higher education, my unearned privileges have allowed me to explore my survivor-ship and heal. This is because these race, class, and ability privileges fit more neatly into the narrow parameters of our patriarchal society while leaving me blind to other, more marginalized, experiences. These experiences differ from my own but what matters is a willingness to acknowledge these differences and listen to these experiences. A concern that will be addressed in my research is the erasure or silence of victims and survivors pushed to the margins of society and otherwise incapable of finding the justice they need to heal.

## Context Review

As part of the first principle of feminist critical theory, this chapter addresses the situational context of when and where this research takes place. This chapter begins by exploring the history and influence of American rape laws. Until the 1970s, rape laws were so loosely defined and open to the interpretation of the jurors and judge, that most victims of sexual assault were unable to even seek justice. In the 1970's, reformers in the United States protested the rape laws and set forth eight elements of reform with the purpose of removing biases that work against victims of sexual assault. In the following section, I define rape culture and provide an overview of four distinct types of rape myths and how reformers addressed these while changing the rape laws. I discuss how internalized rape myth acceptance has prevented these state-level reforms to have a full impact as rape myth acceptance informs the criminal justice system at every stage of proceedings. The final section, on the discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits in Detroit, provides the most transparent example of how rape myth acceptance prevents victims from being granted justice and protection by the criminal justice system. I conclude with an overview of the initiatives post-discovery that are committed to dismantling rape myth acceptance through engaging with and educating the general public.

The first rape laws in the U.S. were based on English Common Law which can be traced back to 17<sup>th</sup> century medieval England (Reddington, 2005, p. 235). These laws defined rape as “carnal knowledge of a woman by force and against her will” (Reddington, 2005, p. 235). Traditionally, these laws were enacted to protect a man’s “property” and the assault was not considered a personal crime against the woman herself (Reddington, 2005, p. 235). In adapting the English Common Laws, most states only recognized a rape if a man physically forced a woman, who was not his wife, to have sexual intercourse, she resisted strenuously, and there was

outside corroboration to prove her testimony (Garland, 2005, p. 12). This limiting definition of rape was narrow for who could report sexual assault, and was subject to the interpretation of the court and jurors which left many victims without justice for their victimization (Reddington, 2005, p. 236).

In the early 1970's, attention was given to these narrow rape laws and motivated a movement for reform within the United States (Reddington, 2005, p. 236). The goal of these state-level reforms was to remove barriers that discouraged victims from reporting sexual assault and provide prosecutors with the tools to successfully convict offenders (Reddington, 2005, p. 246). In 1974, Michigan was the first state to enact what was considered one of the most comprehensive rape law reforms (Spohn & Horney, 1993, p. 386). Within this reform were eight elements that sought to redefine rape as sexual assault, establish four degrees of gender-neutral sexual assault conduct, and enact a rape shield law that prohibits the defendants from using the victim's character, behavior, or reputation as evidence of false accusation (Spohn & Horney, 1993, p. 386).

The first element of this reform was to adjust the language used within the rape laws themselves. "Rape" was redefined as "sexual assault". The purpose of this redefinition was to eliminate the common misunderstanding of the motive behind rape. "Sexual assault" captures the actual motive which is to dominate and achieve or maintain power, as opposed to "rape" being excused by uncontrollable sexual desire (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1197). Reformers also advocated for laws to adopt gender-neutral language to account for the victimization of everyone, and not just cis-gendered women (Reddington, 1997, p. 239). Finally, the definition of sexual assault as exclusive to vaginal penetration was expanded to include non-consensual oral, anal, and object sexual activity (Reddington, 1997, p. 239).

The next two elements of reform were intended to redefine “non-consent” and “force” (Reddington, 1997, p. 237). These are two separate issues as non-consent focuses on the victim whereas force focuses on the accused. Under English Common Law, these issues were determined by measuring resistance from the victim (Reddington, 1997, p. 237). The victim had to prove (usually through injury) that they exercised every physical means within their power to prevent the accused from completing the assault (Reddington, 1997, p. 237). However, this does not account for non-physical force such as coercion, the threat of injury, or the possibility of an escalation of violence, nor does it account for the differing ways that individuals react when they are confronted with violent crime (Reddington, 1997, p. 238).

Charging and punishing was the fourth element of the traditional American rape laws under reform. Traditionally, individual circumstances of the sexual assault did not influence the charge or punishment (Reddington, 1997, p. 240). Those found guilty of rape were charged with capital punishment (Reddington, 1997, p. 241). Reformers suggested that this was too harsh and actually prevented convictions of those who were guilty (Reddington, 1997, p. 241). This was expanded under the reform by establishing four degrees of charging all with punishments that vary by state. In Michigan, first degree sexual misconduct is punishable by imprisonment for life or any term of years, second and third degree is punishable by imprisonment for not more than fifteen years, and fourth degree is a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for not more than two years or a fine of not more than \$500.00 (Michigan Legislature, 2017).

The fifth and sixth elements work together to remove skepticism of the victim’s testimony. Reformers advocated to remove the corroboration doctrine. This doctrine required that the victim provided additional evidence to accompany their testimony to ensure that they were not making a false accusation (Reddington, 1997, p. 241). Reformers also advocated to remove

cautionary instruction to the jurors. Traditionally, jurors were warned by the judge to be cautious as it was believed that "...accusations of sexual assault were easily made, hard to be proven, and hard to be defended, so to not punish innocent men by death" (Reddington, 1997, p. 242).

Reformers argued that the corroboration doctrine and cautionary instruction was prejudicial to the victim as it biased jurors to believe they are untrustworthy. Thus, they were removed from the judicial process (Reddington, 1997, p. 242).

The seventh element of reform was to eliminate the marital exception. Under the English Common Law, a husband could not be accused of sexually assaulting their wife as they were considered "sexual property" and should legally be sexually available to them (Reddington, 1997, p. 242). Although this was met with resistance, reformers were eventually successful in removing the marital exception from the traditional American rape laws.

The final element under the reform was to include rape shield. Traditionally, there was no protection for victims once they took the stand (Reddington, 1997, p. 243). Victims were subject to questions about their past sexual behavior, personal habits, and emotional history (Reddington, 1997, p. 243). Reformers argued that these questions had no relevance to whether the victim was sexually assaulted, and only worked to further harm the victim and exonerate the accused (Reddington, 1997, p. 243-244). Therefore, they pushed for the creation of a law to protect them. Creating these rape shield laws intended to place the focus back on the behavior of the accused rather than putting the victim's character on trial (Reddington, 1997, p. 244).

It was assumed that the reform would increase prosecution and conviction rates of sexual assault cases that did not conform to a "real rape" with a "genuine victim", but research has shown that there is little support for this (Spohn & Horney, 1993, p. 398). It has been argued that this 'justice gap' is a result of traditional rape laws that have been normalized, tolerated, and

internalized within a systematic belief system called “rape culture” that supports sexual violence within a specific society (Guckenheimer, 2008, p. 581). Within rape culture are “rape myths”; descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape that serves to deny, downplay, or justify sexual violence (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 20). As part of rape culture, “real rape” is the idea that only reputable individuals who were violently attacked by a weapon-wielding stranger hiding in the bushes are telling the truth. This is a myth. All rape is real rape.

Identified in the literature are four types of rape myths (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 19). The first set of myths blame the victim for their victimization (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 19). For example, the resistance requirement stemmed from the myth that women secretly wish to be raped and that when a woman says “no” they actually mean “try harder” (Garland, 1997, p. 19-20). These myths reinforce assigned sex roles of women as passive participants and men as the aggressors (Garland, 1997, p. 20).

The second set of rape myths express disbelief in claims of rape (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 19). This is rooted in the myth that women would claim false sexual assault for two reasons: guilt and vengeance (Garland, 1997, p. 16). Historically, sexual transgressions outside of marriage were deemed inappropriate, so it was believed that false claims of sexual assault were a way to placate guilt and keep their reputation intact (Garland, 1997, p. 16). Furthermore, it was believed that false claims of sexual assault were used to seek vengeance against those who did not reciprocate their attraction (Garland, 1997, p. 16). These myths portray victims as “untrustworthy”, and so in response to this, the criminal justice system included a corroboration doctrine and cautionary instruction to ensure that the innocent would not be punished. However, false reports of sexual assault are actually as uncommon as false reports for other crimes and have generally been estimated at three to five percent.

The third set of rape myths serves to exonerate the perpetrator (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 19). For example, the belief that sexual assault is motivated by uncontrollable sexual desire alleviates the accused of being accountable for their actions. Reformers addressed this myth by redefining rape as sexual assault and refocusing the criminal justice system on the violent nature of the crime. Another example of a myth that exonerates the accused is the belief that all rapists are “monsters”; distant from ordinary people that we know and care for (O'Hara, 2012, p. 248).

The final set of rape myths assume that only certain types of people are victimized (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 19). Victims who deviate from gender and sex norms by engaging in activities such as drinking, dressing provocatively, being sexually active, and other activities at what are considered inappropriate times or places, are blamed for their victimization (Garland, 1997, p. 17-18). Reformers addressed this myth by including rape shield statutes that serve to protect victims against irrelevant questions about their character.

Research indicates that rape myth acceptance in society stems from cognitive functions which could explain these gaps in justice (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 23). Researchers argue that rape myth acceptance is a general cognitive schema that guides and organizes an individual's interpretation of specific information about sexual assault (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 23). When an individual is faced with a possible ‘match’ between incoming information and schema-related information, processing this information becomes selective. Researchers argue that victim-blaming conclusions about rape cases that blame the victim and exonerate the accused stem from a cognitive motive called ‘just-world theory’ (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 27). The premise of this theory is that bad things only happen to bad people. This theory provides reassurance; if precautions are taken then

people will not be victims of sexual assault (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 27).

When this reassurance is challenged by cases where innocent people are suffering from violence, the response is to blame the victim for their own victimization (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 27).

The internalization of these rape myths have been so powerful that despite the legal reform in 1974 they are still held by the general public. This effects the criminal justice system as it is the general public that serves as jurors and thus reinforces barriers that victims face when they report their victimization (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, p. 18). All criminal cases in Michigan proceed through the system in similar ways. As outlined by the Prosecuting Attorney's Association of Michigan (1998-2018), when a crime is committed, and police are notified, an investigation begins which involves interviews with the victim and witnesses, evidence collection, visiting the crime scene, and identifying suspects. If there is enough evidence against a suspect, the investigator will submit a charging or warrant request to the prosecutor who then determines whether a person should be charged and with what charges. If a warrant is issued, the suspect is taken into custody and a District Court arraignment is arranged. At this point, the accused is told what the charges are, the maximum penalty they could face, and is advised of their rights and the conditions that lead up to their trial. At the trial, the prosecutor presents evidence to prove the defendant's guilt which is deliberated upon by the jury and a resulting verdict is returned. If found guilty, an appropriate sentence is given by the judge.

Without enough admissible evidence to try a case successfully, the investigator may not issue a warrant request or the prosecutor will not lay charges as they only want to try cases that they think will result in conviction as determined by the jury (Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, 1998-2018). This is true for all criminal cases; however, in the context of sexual



assault cases, rape myth acceptance has a substantial role at every stage of the procedure. Sexual assault can cause victims multiple, adverse, and long-term effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder, fear and anxiety, substance dependence, and suicidal ideation and attempts (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009, pp. 225-226). Many of these effects are rooted in internalized rape myth acceptance which causes self-blame. When the victim reports the crime, interactions that they have with people in the legal system can aid their healing process, or it can magnify and exasperate feelings of powerlessness, shame, and guilt—which Campbell (1998, p. 356) terms “secondary victimization”.

Following the assault, the victim chooses whether they wish to report their victimization (Shaw, et al., 2016, p. 1477). Being pre-disposed to rape myths themselves, the individual may choose against reporting the assault—especially if its circumstances deviate away from “real rape”—to protect themselves from hostile treatment against their character (World Health Organization, 2015, p. 35). If they do report the assault, the police officer then typically begins their investigation by determining if there is enough evidence to pass the case on to the prosecutor (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1230). Rationalization to unfound cases may be due to factors that blame the victim, such as: promiscuity, intoxication, inconsistencies, lack of corroboration, compliance to accompany the accused to the site of the sexual assault, a history of mental illness, lack of emotion, a previous relationship with the accused, or the assault was not promptly reported (Kreisel, 2005, p. 257). In cases that are founded, the investigator then needs a suspect so that the case can be handed over to the prosecutor. This process varies based on whether the victim knows the accused or not. If the victim does not know the perpetrator, the investigator typically tries to determine who committed the crime and where they can be found (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1234). In cases where the victim does know the accused, the

investigator typically tries to determine if the victim truly did not give consent (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1234). This sharp distinction in victim-blaming is not a legal distinction—it is informed by internalized rape myths (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1201).

Cases that do pass the evidential stage are given to the prosecutor who typically chooses whether to authorize an arrest and press charges. However, the prosecutor, also being affected by rape myths, takes into consideration extralegal factors (age, occupation, education, relationship with the offender, reputation, and behaviour) when evidence is weak (Spears & Spohn, 1997, p. 503). Generally, with all criminal cases, prosecutors file cases where odds of a conviction at trial are high and reject charges where conviction is unlikely (Spears & Spohn, 1997, 502). Therefore, prosecutors are much more likely to file charges in instances of violent stranger rape cases, and alternatively reject acquaintance rape cases, with a “bad” victim (Spears & Spohn, 1997, p. 506).

The decision to prosecute is strongly influenced by how it is predicted that the jurors, who are also pre-disposed to rape myths, will react to the case. When evidence against the defendant is weak or contradictory, jurors deviate from their fact-finding mission and are put in a position that frees them to consider their sentiments, values, and even biases (Spears & Spohn, 1997, 505). Juries are susceptible to extralegal factors that adhere to rape myths and undermine the credibility of the victim as these myths are widely endorsed in the general population in which jurors are drawn (Krahé & Temkin, 2009, p. 304). It has been argued that if we wish to improve conviction rates of sexual assault cases, we need to address the rape myth biases that jurors may hold (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1254). The cases that are unfounded by police and turned away by prosecutors are the ones that the juries are unlikely to convict (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1254). Therefore, although attrition begins with reporting, it is assumed

attrition at the stage of the trial that has the most significant effect on cases falling out of the criminal justice system during each stage prior (Krahé & Temkin, 2009, p. 302).

The power of rape myth acceptance distorts our understanding of gender-based violence and deprives people of protection from the law (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997, p. 1211). One of the most genuine examples of this was the discovery of backlogs of untested sexual assault kits across the United States. Following the assault, whether the victim chooses to report their victimization to the police department or seek medical care, the interdependent nature of these systems results in contact with both, and the victim is inevitably advised to receive a medical forensic exam (MFE) (Shaw, et al., 2016, p. 1477). The purpose of an MFE is to diagnose and treat injuries, offer emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy, and administer prophylaxis for sexually transmitted infections (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 153).

A Sexual Assault Kit (SAK) is recommended as part of the victim's medical forensic exam. A SAK can aid the investigation if the victim reported the assault, or it can be preserved in the event that they decide later to report the assault (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 153). This procedure is time-consuming and highly invasive as it collects hairs, fingernails, pieces of clothing, and vaginal, anal, and oral swabs (Patterson & Campbell, 2012, p. 2260). Once completed, the SAK is taken into custody by law enforcement personnel who are then held responsible for submitting it to the crime laboratory for forensic analysis (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 152). If the SAK contains DNA that does not belong to the victim, it is then uploaded into a national forensic DNA database called CODIS (Combined DNA Index System) (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 153). This database consists of reference DNA profiles from convicted offenders (offender index) and samples obtained from crime scenes

of unknown offenders (forensic index) (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 154; Campbell, Pierce, Sharma, Feeny, & Fehler-Cabral, 2016, p. 558).

There has been some debate that SAK testing should be prioritized based on the relationship the victim has to the accused, but empirical evidence shows that all SAKs, regardless of this relationship, serve a critical purpose for CODIS (Campbell, Pierce, Sharma, Feeny & Fehler-Cabral, 2016, p. 558). In cases where the accused is a stranger of an unknown identity, matches in both the offender and the forensic index have utility. If the DNA profile from the SAK matches a sample in the offender index, a suspect and promising investigational lead are provided (Campbell, Pierce, Sharma, Feeny & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 558). A match in the forensic index does not provide the suspect's identity but does populate CODIS and leaves the potential for a match in the future (Campbell, Pierce, Sharma, Feeny & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 558). In cases where the identity of the accused is known, this evidence could confirm bodily contact between the victim and accused, exonerate the wrongly accused, and further populate the CODIS system (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 154; Campbell, Pierce, Sharma, Feeny, & Fehler-Cabral, 2016, p. 558). Matches from known suspects in the forensic index confirms the identity of unknown suspects in other cases and provides new investigational leads (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 154; Campbell, Pierce, Sharma, Feeny, & Fehler-Cabral, 2016, p. 558). Therefore, testing all SAKs regardless of victim-accused relationship, can prevent ongoing serial rape. Despite the SAKs unquestionable utility for both stranger and non-stranger cases, only 52% of all SAKs collected make it to the forensic crime lab for analysis (Patterson & Campbell, 2012, p. 2260). The implications of just over half of all kits not being tested are enormous; the victim consented to the MFE and the SAK collection with the understanding that the kit would be analyzed and used for their investigation (Campbell, Shaw,

& Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 154). In refusing this, justice is denied and trust is breached as there is no opportunity for that evidence to inform the criminal proceedings (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 154).

In 2008, systemic concerns regarding the processing of crime scene evidence called into question the fairness of past, present, and future criminal cases resulted in the closure of a Detroit police department crime laboratory (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 155). This motivated necessary examination of all aspects of police evidence storage. In 2009, an off-site storage facility was toured by representatives from the local police, state police, and prosecutor's office to discuss storage procedures (Campbell, Shaw, Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 155). It was during this tour that approximately 11,000 untested SAKs were discovered (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 152). An assistant prosecutor questioned dozens of unmarked boxes sitting on the shelves to find that they all contained sexual assault kits. There was no readily accessible information or visual cues as to how many kits were in storage and how many of these had been tested (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 155). At this point, it became clear that the police department itself did not know that they had such a massive accumulation of untested sexual assault kits in their possession (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 156).

On discovery of the backlog, a collaborative multi-disciplinary team of researchers, prosecutors, law enforcement, system-based victim advocates, information technology specialists, health care providers, community-based advocates, and forensic scientists were given an action-research grant through the U.S. Justice Department to analyze a sample of the untested SAKs (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 15). The goals of the Action Research Project (ARP) were to assess the scope of the problem, identify underlying factors that contributed to the

accumulation<sup>2</sup>, develop a plan to efficiently test the SAKs , and create a victim-centered notification protocol (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. iii).

To correctly identify the issues that led to the accumulation of untested sexual assault kits, the team needed to place their research within a historical context (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 154). Two generations ago, Detroit was considered a “healthy beating heart of the American economy” (Martelle, 2012, p. xi). The auto-industry flourished and accounted for one in six jobs across America (Martelle, 2012, p. xi). When Chrysler, General Motors, and Ford all declared—or just barely avoided—bankruptcy, the city that was already suffering from the debilitating effects of deindustrialization became a metaphor for the worn and potholed freeways that once gave the city hope (Martelle, 2012, p. ix-xii). Census data shows that the bankrupt auto-industry and a 62 percent decline in jobs since 1970 had monumental effects on residents in Detroit. These events cut the population in half (from 1.8 million residents in 1950 to 714,000 in 2011) and with the unemployment rate at 29 percent for people of working age, this leaves 40 percent of the population under the poverty line (Martelle, 2012, p. xiii-xiv). The economic downturn has left Detroit and its citizens struggling for decades (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 151).

What researchers of the ARP found was that across all Detroit organizations involved with SAK testing and victim services, chronic resource depletion because of this economic crisis, has led to many barriers (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 99). These barriers include understaffing, budget cuts, leadership transitions, slow implementation of innovations, and minimal support for providers of victim services (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 99). Chronic resource depletion led to three main adverse outcomes. First, when understaffed, individuals with extensive workloads

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<sup>2</sup> For purposes of this research, only the second goal of the ARP will be discussed.

took measures to make it more manageable by prioritizing tasks that were considered high-profile or important (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 100). Second, this chronic resource scarcity decreased an individual's empathy for the people they were supposed to be helping but could not afford to (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 100). Last, chronic resource depletion made it difficult for organizations to collaborate and work together due to the lack of financial resources and time-constraints due to understaffing (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 100). That said, ARP researchers argued that chronic resource scarcity was only part of the problem. To provide a full explanation of the SAK accumulation they undertook a qualitative analysis as to how various professions were approaching sexual assault cases, treating victims, and treating each other (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 100).

Through interviews, ethnographic observations, and archival records, this team of researchers found that chronic resource depletion and harmful victim-blaming attitudes became a reinforcing dynamic (Campbell, et al., 2015, p. 100). Although the Detroit police maintained that there were valid reasons as to why the SAKs had gone untested, it was found that in 71% of the cases the SAKs were not submitted because of fault that was somehow attributed to the victim (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 160). This victim-blaming was evident in the ways that reports had discussed occupation (“deal gone bad”) and victim-offender relationship (“got what they got”) in cases that had been labelled “not really a rape” (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, pp. 161-162). Because of resource and time constraints, investigators would not submit SAKs from cases that deviated away from what was understood to be a “real rape” to the forensic crime laboratory. This pattern of behavior was one of the most evident demonstrations of how rape myths, despite the reform, are internalized within the criminal justice system and inform decisions that are made about cases that deviate away from “real rape”.

The research on this backlog resulted in nation-wide and state-level initiatives to inform and educate the public on rape myth acceptance which maintains barriers to justice for victims of sexual assault. For example, Joyful Heart Foundation (2018), a national non-profit organization, seeks to transform society's response to sexual assault and end gender-based violence. Joyful Heart Foundation (2018) founded many initiatives such as, End the Backlog, NO MORE, and Engaging Men, all of which have active educating components. They have made it their mission to spread awareness on rape myth acceptance by engaging with the public as well as state and federal government organizations (Joyful Heart Foundation, 2018). In Michigan, local non-profits such as WC SAFE (Wayne County Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program), SASHA (Sexual Assault Services for Holistic Healing and Awareness), HAVEN, and the Michigan Women's Foundation and their initiative Enough SAID (Sexual Assault in Detroit) have all included education within their mission statements.

The strong emphasis on public engagement from these organizations suggests that the public would be coming into more regular and meaningful discourse on rape myths and how sexual assault commonly deviates from what "real rape" is. Therefore, I would like to argue that this could affect the publication of print news media as the public can both influence and be influenced by news media outlets. In the following chapter, I will outline and justify the methodology I used to understand whether this influence has been reflected in the publication of sexual assault cases within the *Detroit Free Press* based on which cases were considered "news-worthy" before the discovery of the backlog and most recently.



## **Methodology**

This chapter is divided into three sections: my method, data collection, and data analysis. I first describe and analyze the value of a content analysis of news media and provide a rationale for using the *Detroit Free Press* over other print news media outlets. Processes of data collection are then given in detail. This begins with a justification of the criteria I adhered to in selecting articles for my research and is followed by an explanation of why I chose to collect specific categories of data. For each category of data, I justify its collection as well as which variables of each category are coded. Following this, I explain how this raw data from the *Detroit Free Press* is organized into frequency and percentage tables. I then explain how I created frequency and percentage tables of Michigan Incident Crime Reporting (2008; 2016) statistics for the comparison of the data collected from the *Detroit Free Press*. The final section of this chapter discusses the methods I used to make the comparisons between the data from the *Detroit Free Press* and the MICR (2008; 2016) data for analysis.

### **News Media Content Analysis**

The methodology I used to answer my research questions is a content analysis. The premise of content analysis is to study documents (or “cultural artifacts”) as something that is produced by people by using a systematic approach of counting, coding, or interpreting themes (Reinharz & Kulick, 2007, p. 258). Documents are significant artifacts for analysis because they are physical traces of social settings (Coffey, 2013, p.2). They are not just static containers for information; they are capable of *doing* things as actors on their own (Prior, 2008, p.822). They can influence social interactions and schemes of social organization, and enter into the analysis of such interactions and organizations (Prior, 2008, p. 822). The type of document used for this research is print news media. News media outlets are socio-politically embedded institutions that

are active participants in social processes (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2013, p.2); they produce discourses that contain meanings which reflect and transmit norms and values that are specific to the time and place in which they are created (Reinharz & Kulick, 2007, pp. 257-258). Therefore, news media have the potential to either encourage understanding and support or promote ignorance, discrimination, hierarchy, and dominance amongst its readership (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2013, p.2).

For purposes of this content analysis, I looked at one print news media outlet: The *Detroit Free Press*. This newspaper was founded in 1831 and is the oldest newspaper company in the state of Michigan. Its mission statement is to be “on guard”; providing residents of Detroit with the most trustworthy news and information. The rationale behind using this newspaper over other Detroit-based papers is because it is the oldest daily publication, has all of its archives available online at the Detroit Public Library, and based on social media, it has the most substantial readership and circulation of all local newspapers.

### **Data Collection**

The Detroit Public Library has access to all of the *Detroit Free Press* archives through ProQuest. The advanced search option on the ProQuest database allowed me to use keywords and date ranges to select my sample of articles. The keywords I used were “sexual assault” and “rape” for the years 2008 (pre-discovery of untested SAKs) and 2016 (the most recent full calendar year since the start of this research). Not all articles with these keywords fit within the criteria for analysis. Articles that did not include allegations of a sexual assault, nor have both a victim and offender (even if only implied), were excluded from my analysis. This includes news commentaries on, for example, ending sexual assault on campus, reviews of movies with sexual content, and fundraisers for non-profits that provide victim-advocacy.

With articles selected for analysis, I then decided what categories of data to collect in order to answer my research questions. I created two identical tables (one for each year) and a corresponding legend (Table A). The first four columns collected referencing information (date, author name, headline, section). However, this data has been purposefully removed from my final tables (Table B1.1 and Table B2.1) as this information was only documented for organizational purposes. Despite being published and publicly available, I found it important to avoid generating additional traffic to these articles as they have the potential to re-traumatize victims who were already subject to victim-blaming. The following eight columns (as seen in Table A, Table B1.1 and Table B2.1) collected data essential for the comparison between years and to the MICR (2008; 2016) data (Table C1.1 and C2.1). The justification for the collection of these categories of data, as well as their corresponding variables assigned to the dummy values “0”, “1”, or “2”, will now follow.

The first two columns of data collection look at the language that is used to access the article and catch the reader’s attention. The first column, “Keyword”, recorded whether the article came up for the keyword search “sexual assault” (0), “rape” (1), or “both keywords” (2). Language is significant, as the term “sexual assault” has replaced the term “rape” in many legal reforms (including the 1975 legal reform in Michigan). The second column, “Headline Subject”, records whether the subject of the headline is the “victim” (0), the “accused” (1), or “not applicable” (2). In her reflection on news media commentary on sexual assault, Kate Harding (2015, p. 36) argues that there is often a tendency to designate the subject of the headline to the victim as opposed to the offender. Subjects are strategically chosen by the writer to set up the way readers should organize information in their heads (Gee, 2014, p. 25). Since the rest of a sentence is organized grammatically around the subject, it is easily recognizable (Gee, 2014, p.

23). In English, the subject always comes after the verb (Gee, 2014, p. 24). For example, in headlines such as “local women raped at gunpoint”, “local women” is the point of which the information “raped at gunpoint” is organized around, but *who* raped this women?

The following six columns collected data that is also made available through MICR (2008; 2016) which allowed for a comparison between years and to reported crime statistics. The first, “Victim Gender”, is coded for “women” (0) and “men” (1). The next column, “Victim Age”, is coded for “under 14” (0), “between 15-19” (1), and “over 20” (2). In the Michigan Legislature (2017), section 750.520 of the penal code, the criminal sexual conduct charges differ if the victim is a minor or an adult. However, the MICR (2008; 2016) data provides age categories that start with under 10, and are then in 5-year increments (10-14, 15-19, 20-24, and so on). Therefore, I created these age groups to remain consistent with MICR (2008; 2016) data while accounting for the impact that age has on charging and sentencing. The following column, “Victim-Accused Relationship”, is coded for “non-stranger” (0), “stranger” (1), and “unknown” (2). “Non-stranger” refers to any pre-existing relationship between the victim and the accused, whereas “stranger” implies that the victim did not know the accused before the assault. Cases were coded as “unknown” if the relationship between the victim and the accused was not explicitly stated in the article. The following column, “Location of Assault”, is coded for “home/residence” (0), “business/establishment” (1), and “public/outside” (2). The “home/residence” variable includes any place that a person lives or stays (i.e. hotels/motels, dormitories, prisons, campgrounds). The “business/establishment” variable includes any place owned, operated, and available to the public (schools, stores, restaurants, workplaces). The “public/outside” variable includes anywhere that is considered public space (highways, parks, alleys, transit stops, parking lots). The following two columns, “Weapon” and “Injury”, are

coded for “none” (0), “yes” (1), and “unknown” (2). “None” was only coded if the article explicitly stated that there was no weapon present and no injury inflicted on the victim. Otherwise, the article was coded for “unknown” as assumptions could not be made in the absence of this information.

Following data collection, I created frequency (Tables B1.2 and B2.2) and percentage (Tables B1.3 and B2.3) tables for each year as this research looks at the overall representation of sexual assault cases in the *Detroit Free Press*. The frequency table was created by counting how many times each dummy variable occurred for every category. This was then converted into a percentages table by dividing each frequency by the data set number. The purpose of converting frequencies into percentages is to allow for the comparison between years and the MICR (2008; 2016) data despite the differing sample sizes.

The next step in data collection was to create frequency (Tables C1.1 and C2.1) and percentage tables (Tables C1.2 and C2.2) derived from MICR (2008; 2016) data for each year. MICR (2008; 2016) is an annual publication of all reported crimes provided by the Michigan State Police through the state governments website (<https://michigan.gov>). This resource provides data separately for each kind of offense such as sexual assault, homicide, arson, robbery, and so on. The document on reported sexual assault provides information on victim age, race<sup>3</sup>, and gender, the victim-accused relationship, the location of assault, presence or absence of a weapon or injury, and arrests<sup>4</sup>. Within these categories, some variables from the MICR (2008; 2016) data had to be combined to ensure that this data could be comparable to the *Detroit Free Press* data. MICR (2008; 2016) data for “Victim Age” required that the categories “under 10”

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<sup>3</sup> Victim race was not used in my analysis as the *Detroit Free Press* never explicitly stated the victims race.

<sup>4</sup> Information on arrests was not used in my analysis because a very small fraction of articles published in the *Detroit Free Press* took place after sentencing.

and “10-14” were combined, “15-19” was left as is, and every age group after this was combined (except for “unknown”). MICR (2008; 2016) data for “Victim-Accused Relationship” includes specific relationships (for example, “relative”, “partner”, and “employer”) for each reported sexual assault, so for purposes of this research all known relationships were combined into one category: “non-stranger”. MICR (2008; 2016) data for “Location” records specific places (for example, “campground”, “highway”, and “college campus”) for each reported sexual assault. Therefore, each location had to be assigned to one of the three variables (“home/residence”, “business/establishment”, or “public/outside”). Finally, MICR (2008; 2016) records specific weapons used and injuries inflicted, so to compare what is reported in the *Detroit Free Press* to MICR data, all weapons and injuries were combined, leaving “none” and “unknown” as is. After these variables were adjusted for comparison purposes, frequency (Tables C1.1 and C2.1) and percentage (Tables C1.2 and C2.2) tables were created in the same way as the *Detroit Free Press* frequency (Tables B1.2 and B2.2) and percentage (Tables B2.2 and B2.3) tables.

### **Data Analysis**

In 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* had 126 total results for “sexual assault” and 133 results for “rape”. Of those, only 46 articles fit my criteria and were suitable for my analysis. Fourteen of the 46 articles were from the keyword “sexual assault”, 22 from the keyword “rape”, and ten that came from both. In 2016, the *Detroit Free Press* had 162 results for “sexual assault” and 91 results for “rape”. Of those, only 46 articles fit my criteria and were suitable for my analysis. Twenty-eight of the 46 articles were from the keyword “sexual assault”, four from the keyword “rape”, and 14 that came from both.

Upon data collection, the first analysis conducted was a comparison between 2008 and 2016 data collected from the *Detroit Free Press*. To obtain the absolute difference, I subtracted

the 2008 frequency percentage from the 2016 frequency percentage to get a result in percentage points (Table D1). Because the 2008 figures were subtracted from the 2016 figures a result that is positive means that representation in the *Detroit Free Press* for that variable has increased where a result that is negative means that it has decreased.

Following this, I compared the frequency percentage of “Victim Gender”, “Victim Age”, “Victim-Accused Relationship”, “Location of Assault”, “Weapon”, and “Injury” in the *Detroit Free Press* to MICR (2008; 2016) data for each year. This comparison would allow for a perspective on how the *Detroit Free Press* adequately represents or misrepresents reported sexual assault cases. To obtain the absolute difference, I subtracted the frequency results (in percentage) of the MICR (2008; 2016) data from the frequency results (in percentage) of the *Detroit Free Press* data to get results in percentage points (Table D2 and D3). Because MICR (2008; 2016) figures were subtracted from *Detroit Free Press* figures, a positive value means it is over-represented where a negative value means it is under-represented.

The final comparison made was between the results of the comparisons between years to MICR (2008; 2016) data to observe how this representation has changed over time. To obtain the absolute difference, I subtracted the 2016 results of Table D3 (in percentage points) from the 2008 results of Table D2 (in percentage points) to get results in percentage points (Table D4). Therefore, a result that is positive means that since 2008, representation of that variable has increased where a result that is negative means that since 2008, representation of that variable has decreased.

## Results

In this chapter, I present the results of the analysis beginning with the first category: “Keyword”. For each of the categories, summary tables have been included in the text to illustrate precisely what the results indicate. However, raw data, counts and summaries can be found in Appendix A, B, C, and D and are often referred to within the analysis of my results. In this chapter, I am trying to answer my two research questions separately for each category of data:

1. How representative is the *Detroit Free Press* of reported sexual assaults for the years 2008 and 2016?
2. Has the *Detroit Free Press* become more or less representative of Michigan Incident Crime Reporting (MICR) since the discovery of the backlog of untested sexual assault kits?

### Keyword

The raw data (Appendix B) shows that in 2008, 30% of the articles ( $n=14$ ) were found using the keyword “sexual assault” whereas, in 2016, 61% of the articles ( $n=28$ ) were found using this keyword. In 2008, 48% of the articles ( $n=22$ ) were found using the keyword “rape” whereas, in 2016, only 9% of the articles ( $n=4$ ) were found using this keyword. In 2008, 22% of the articles ( $n=10$ ) came up for both keywords (“sexual assault” and “rape”) whereas, in 2016, 30% of the articles ( $n=14$ ) came up for both keywords. Therefore, results from my analysis (Table 1) showed that in 2016, the keyword search for “sexual assault” increased by 30 percentage points, the keyword search for “rape” decreased by 39 percentage points, and articles that came up for both keywords increased by nine percentage points.

*Table 1: Change in Keyword results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP*

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>
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0 (sexual assault)	30.43
1 (rape)	-39.13
2 (both)	8.70

Note. data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = Detroit Free Press.

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

### Headline subject

The raw data (Appendix B) shows that in 2008, the headline subject is the victim in 20% of all articles ( $n=9$ ), the accused in 41% of the articles ( $n=19$ ), and neither in 39% of the articles ( $n=18$ ). In 2016, the headline subject is the victim in 18% of the articles ( $n=8$ ), the accused in 41% of articles ( $n=19$ ), and neither in 41% of the articles ( $n=19$ ). Results from my analysis (Table 2) show that between the years there has not been a drastic change.

Table 2: Change in Headline subject results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>
0 (victim)	-2.17
1 (accused)	0.00
2 (both)	2.17

Note. data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = Detroit Free Press

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

### Victim gender<sup>5</sup>

Results from my analysis (Table 3) shows that since 2008, the representation of women-identified victims in the Detroit Free Press increased by 15 percentage points. The raw data (Table B1.3) shows that in 2008, 74% ( $n=34$ ) of the victims were women and 26% ( $n=12$ ) were men. Therefore, with the 15 percentage point increase, in 2016, 89% ( $n=41$ ) of the victims were women, and 11% ( $n=5$ ) were men. In 2008, the representation of women-identified victims was 22 percentage points less than MICR (2008) data. The raw MICR (2008) data (Table C1.2) shows that in 2008, 96% of the victims were women and 4% were men. Therefore, if the *Detroit*

<sup>5</sup> There were no published articles in the *Detroit Free Press* that included transgender or gender non-conforming victims nor was this information made available through MICR (2008; 2016) data.

*Free Press* were to provide an accurate representation of the variation of gender in reported sexual assaults, we would expect only two of the victims to be men, and the other 44 to be women. In 2016, the representation of women-identified victims was only 7.71 percentage points less than MICR (2016) data. The raw MICR (2016) data (Table C2.2) shows that in 2016, 97% of the victims were women and 3% were men. Therefore, if the *Detroit Free Press* were to provide an accurate representation of reported sexual assaults, we would expect only one of the victims to be a man, and the other 45 to be women. Together, this means that between the years, representation of women-identified victims increased by 14.22 percentage points, but still provides an under-representation of victims who are women and an over-representation of victims who are men.

*Table 3: Change in Victim Gender results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP and compared to MICR*

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>	(2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) <sup>b</sup>	(2016 DFP - 2016 MICR) <sup>c</sup>	((2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) - (2016 DFP - 2016 MICR)) <sup>d</sup>
0 (woman)	15.22	-21.93	-7.71	14.22
1 (man)	-15.22	21.93	7.71	-14.22

*Note.* data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = *Detroit Free Press*, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting.

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

<sup>b</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D2 in Appendix D.

<sup>c</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D3 in Appendix D.

<sup>d</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has increased since 2008, and a negative value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has decreased since 2008. From Table D4 in Appendix D.

### **Victim age**

The raw data (Table B1.2 and B1.3) for the year 2008, shows that in the *Detroit Free Press*, 35% of the victims ( $n=16$ ) were under the age of 14, 37% of the victims ( $n=17$ ) were between the ages 15 and 19, and 28% of the victims ( $n=13$ ) were over the age of twenty. The raw

MICR (2008) data (Table C1.2) for this year, shows that in reported sexual assault cases, 38% of victims were under the age of 14, 33% were between the ages 15 and 19, and 29% of the victims were over the age of twenty. Therefore, the representation of victim age in the *Detroit Free Press* was closely aligned with MICR (2008) data. The raw data (Table B2.2 and B2.3) for the year 2016, shows that in the *Detroit Free Press*, 37% of the victims ( $n=17$ ) were under the age of 14, 13% of the victims ( $n=6$ ) were between the ages 15 and 19, and 50% of the victims ( $n=23$ ) were over the age of twenty. The raw MICR (2016) data (Table C2.2) for this year, shows that in reported sexual assault cases, 32% of the victims were under the age of 14, 32% were between the ages 15 and 19, and 36% were over the age of twenty. Therefore, the representation of victim age in the *Detroit Free Press* was less aligned with MICR (2016) data than it was in 2008. The *Detroit Free Press* over-represented victims under the age of 14 by five percentage points, under-represented victims between the ages 15 and 19 by 19 percentage points, and over-represented victims over the age of twenty by 14 percentage points. Therefore, since 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* has become less representative of victim age when compared to MICR (2008; 2016) data. Since 2008, the representation of victims under the age of 14 has increased by eight percentage points, representation of victims between the ages 15-19 has decreased by 23 percentage points, and the representation of victims over the age of twenty has increased by 15 percentage points.

*Table 4: Change in Victim Age results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP and compared to MICR*

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>	(2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) <sup>b</sup>	(2016 DFP - 2016 MICR) <sup>c</sup>	((2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) - (2016 DFP - 2016 MICR)) <sup>d</sup>
0 (under 14)	2.17	-3.57	4.57	8.14
1 (15-19)	-23.91	3.97	-18.91	-22.88
2 (over 20)	21.74	-0.39	14.34	14.74

*Note.* data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = Detroit Free Press, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting.

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

<sup>b</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D2 in Appendix D.  
<sup>c</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D3 in Appendix D.  
<sup>d</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has increased since 2008, and a negative value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has decreased since 2008. From Table D4 in Appendix D.

### **Victim-accused relationship**

The raw data (Table B1.2 and B1.3) for the year 2008, shows that 81% of sexual assault cases ( $n=37$ ) published in the *Detroit Free Press* occurred between non-strangers, 17% of cases ( $n=8$ ) occurred between strangers, and in 2% of articles ( $n=1$ ), the relationship was unknown. The raw MICR (2008) data shows that during this year, 78% of reported sexual assaults occurred between non-strangers, 7% occurred between strangers, and in 15% of cases, the relationship was unknown (Table C1.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* over-represented sexual assaults between non-strangers by two percentage points, over-represented sexual assaults between strangers by ten percentage points, and under-represented sexual assaults where the relationship is unknown by 12 percentage points (Table 5). The raw data (Table B2.2 and B2.3) for the year 2016, shows that 61% of sexual assault cases ( $n=28$ ) occurred between non-strangers, 35% of cases ( $n=16$ ) occurred between strangers, and in 4% of cases ( $n=2$ ), the relationship was unknown. The raw MICR (2016) data shows that during this year, 80% of reported sexual assaults occurred between non-strangers, 8% occurred between strangers, and in 13% of cases, the relationship was unknown (Table C2.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assaults that occurred between non-strangers by 19 percentage points, over-represented sexual assaults that between strangers by 27 percentage points, and under-represented sexual assaults where the relationship was unknown by eight percentage points (Table 5). MICR (2008; 2016) data for victim-accused relationship changed only slightly between these years, but between 2008 and 2016, in comparison to MICR (2008; 2016) data, representation in the *Detroit*

*Free Press* changed dramatically. The representation of sexual assaults that occurred between non-strangers decreased by 21 percentage points since 2008, while the representation of sexual assaults that occurred between strangers increased by 17 percentage points since 2008 (Table 5). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* was less representative in 2016 of victim-accused relationship compared to MICR (2008; 2016) data.

Table 5: Change in Victim-Accused Relationship results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP and compared to MICR

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>	(2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) <sup>b</sup>	(2016 DFP - 2016 MICR) <sup>c</sup>	((2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) - (2016 DFP - 2016 MICR)) <sup>d</sup>
0 (non-stranger)	-19.57	2.32	-18.97	-21.29
1 (stranger)	17.39	10.07	27.17	17.10
2 (unknown)	2.17	-12.39	8.20	4.19

Note. Data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = Detroit Free Press, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting.

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

<sup>b</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D2 in Appendix D.

<sup>c</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D3 in Appendix D.

<sup>d</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has increased since 2008, and a negative value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has decreased since 2008. From Table D4 in Appendix D.

## Location of assault

The raw data (Table B1.2 and B1.3) for the year 2008, shows that 58% of sexual assault cases ( $n=26$ ) published in the *Detroit Free Press* occurred in a home or residence, 33% of cases ( $n=15$ ) occurred in a business or establishment, 9% of cases ( $n=4$ ) occurred in public or outside. The raw MICR (2008) data shows that during this year, 85% of reported sexual assaults occurred in a home or residence, 5% occurred in a business or establishment, and 10% occurred in public or outside (Table C1.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assaults that occurred in a home or residence by 27 percentage points, over-represented sexual assaults that

occurred in a business or establishment by 29 percentage points, and under-represented sexual assaults that occurred in public or outside by one percentage point (Table 6). The raw data (Table B2.2 and B2.3) for the year 2016, shows that 73% of sexual assault cases ( $n=32$ ) published in the *Detroit Free Press* occurred in a home or residence, 7% of cases ( $n=3$ ) occurred in a business or establishment, and 20% of cases ( $n=9$ ) occurred in public or outside. The raw MICR (2016) data shows that during this year, 84% of reported sexual assaults occurred in a home or residence, 5% occurred in a business or establishment, and 11% in public or outside (Table C2.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assaults that occurred in a home or residence by 11 percentage points, over-represented sexual assaults that occurred in a business or establishment by one percentage point, and over-represented sexual assaults that occurred in public or outside by ten percentage points (Table 6). The MICR (2008; 2016) data for the location of assault changed only slightly between these years, but between 2008 and 2016 and in comparison to MICR (2008; 2016) data, representation in the *Detroit Free Press* changed dramatically. The representation of sexual assaults that occurred in a home or residence increased by 16.31 percentage points closer to MICR (2008; 2016) data, and the over-representation of sexual assaults that occurred in a business or establishment decreased by 27 percentage points closer to MICR (2008; 2016) data (Table 6). However, representation of sexual assaults that occurred in public or outside increased by 11 percentage points further away from MICR (2008; 2016) data (Table 6).

Table 6: Change in Location of Assault results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP and compared to MICR

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>	(2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) <sup>b</sup>	(2016 DFP - 2016 MICR) <sup>c</sup>	((2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) - (2016 DFP - 2016 MICR)) <sup>d</sup>
0 (home/residence)	14.95	-27.32	-11.02	16.31
1 (business/establishment)	-26.52	28.52	1.42	-27.09
2 (public/outside)	11.57	-1.19	9.59	10.79

Note. data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = Detroit Free Press, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting.

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

<sup>b</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D2 in Appendix D.

<sup>c</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D3 in Appendix D.

<sup>d</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the Detroit Free Press compared to MICR data in 2016 has increased since 2008, and a negative value means that the representation in the Detroit Free Press compared to MICR data in 2016 has decreased since 2008. From Table D4 in Appendix D.

## Weapon

The raw data (Table B1.2 and B1.3) for the year 2008, shows that in 41% ( $n=19$ ) of the sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* a weapon was not used wherein 46% ( $n=21$ ) cases a weapon was used. The raw MICR (2008) data shows that during this year, 50% of reported sexual assaults did not include a weapon, and 46% did (Table C1.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assaults without weapon-use by nine percentage points, but accurately represented cases with weapon-use (Table 7). The raw data (Table B2.2 and B2.3) for the year 2016, shows that in 33% ( $n=15$ ) of the sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* a weapon was not used where in 50% ( $n=23$ ) a weapon was used. The raw MICR (2016) data shows that during this year, 57% (an increase since 2008) of reported sexual assaults did not include weapon-use, and 37% (a decrease since 2016) did (Table C2.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assaults without weapon-use by 25 percentage points and over-represented sexual assaults with weapon-use by 13 percentage points

(Table 7). In 2016, the representation of non-weapon-use decreased by 16 percentage points while the representation of weapon-use increased by 13 percentage points (Table 7). Therefore, since 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* has become less representative of the presence or absence of a weapon in a sexual assault case.

Table 7: Change in Weapon results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP and compared to MICR

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>	(2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) <sup>b</sup>	(2016 DFP - 2016 MICR) <sup>c</sup>	((2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) - (2016 DFP - 2016 MICR)) <sup>d</sup>
0 (none)	-8.70	-8.80	-24.81	-16.01
1 (yes)	4.35	-0.45	12.92	13.37
2 (unknown) <sup>6</sup>	4.35	9.25	11.89	2.64

Note. data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = Detroit Free Press, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting.

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

<sup>b</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D2 in Appendix D.

<sup>c</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D3 in Appendix D.

<sup>d</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the Detroit Free Press compared to MICR data in 2016 has increased since 2008, and a negative value means that the representation in the Detroit Free Press compared to MICR data in 2016 has decreased since 2008. From Table D4 in Appendix D.

## Injury

The raw data (Table B1.2 and B1.3) for the year 2008, shows that in 48% ( $n=22$ ) of the sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* an injury did not occur wherein 15% ( $n=7$ ) cases an injury did occur. The raw MICR (2008) data shows that during this year, 74% of the reported sexual assaults did not include an injury, and 26% did (Table C1.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assaults without an injury by 27 percentage points and under-represented sexual assaults with an injury by ten percentage points (Table 8). This dual under-representation is possible, as MICR (2008) data did not include any cases where

<sup>6</sup> Because information on weapon-use was not always explicitly stated within *Detroit Free Press* publications, the frequency for “unknown” is going to be inevitably larger than what was reported to officials as seen in MICR (2008; 2016) data.



injury was unknown. Therefore, any unknown injury in the *Detroit Free Press* is an over-representation. The raw data (Table B2.2 and B2.3) for the year 2016, shows that in 30% ( $n=14$ ) of the sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* an injury did not occur wherein 48% ( $n=22$ ) did. The raw MICR (2016) data shows that during this year, 77% of reported sexual assaults did not include an injury, and 23% did (Table C2.2). Therefore, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assaults without an injury by 46 percentage points and over-represented sexual assaults with an injury by 25 percentage points (Table 8). In 2016, the under-representation of non-injury decreased by 20 percentage points while the representation of injury increased by 35 percentage points (Table 8). Therefore, since 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* has become less representative of the presence or absence of an injury in sexual assault cases.

*Table 8: Change of Injury results from 2008 to 2016 in the DFP and compared to MICR*

Code	(2016 DFP - 2008 DFP) <sup>a</sup>	(2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) <sup>b</sup>	(2016 DFP - 2016 MICR) <sup>c</sup>	((2008 DFP - 2008 MICR) - (2016 DFP - 2016 MICR)) <sup>d</sup>
0 (none)	-17.39	-26.56	-46.43	-19.87
1 (yes)	32.61	-10.39	24.69	35.09
2 (unknown) <sup>7</sup>	-15.22			

*Note.* data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), DFP = Detroit Free Press, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting.

<sup>a</sup>a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016. From Table D1 in Appendix D.

<sup>b</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D2 in Appendix D.

<sup>c</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data. From Table D3 in Appendix D.

<sup>d</sup>a positive value means that the representation in the Detroit Free Press compared to MICR data in 2016 has increased since 2008, and a negative value means that the representation in the Detroit Free Press compared to MICR data in 2016 has decreased since 2008. From Table D4 in Appendix D.

<sup>7</sup> Because information on injury was not always explicitly stated within *Detroit Free Press* publications, the frequency for “unknown” is going to be inevitably larger than what was reported to officials as seen in MICR (2008; 2016) data especially since there was no “unknown” category for injury in this document.

## Discussion

Rape myth acceptance has many detrimental effects. It is argued that although the reform influences practice within the judicial system what needs to coincide is the promotion of a widespread attitudinal change of rape myth acceptance (Reddington, 1997, p.247). Given how pervasive rape myth acceptance is within the general populace, there is a reason to assume that rape myth acceptance also exists within mass media (Franiuk, Seefeldt, & Vandello, 2008, p.791). Previous research has not only shown evidence that news media coverage of sexual assault cases use rape myths to promote victim-blaming and exonerate the accused, but also indicates that news media coverage of sexual assault cases can expose or strengthen rape myth acceptance among the general public (Franiuk, Seefeldt, & Vandello, 2008, p. 790). In this discussion chapter, I will begin with “Keyword” and move through each of the variables offering an account of its representation and what this could mean for anyone, especially other victims and survivors of sexual assault, when they read these published commentaries of sexual assault cases.

I previously stated (see page 11 in Context Review) that a large part of the rape law legal reform in Michigan was an adjustment of language to remove barriers for victims that fell outside of what was (and arguably still is) considered a “real” or “genuine” victim. As part of this movement, reformers advocated for the use of the word “sexual assault” in place of “rape” when defining the crime. In finding the sample of articles for each year, I collected frequency data on how many articles used the keyword “rape” and “sexual assault”. Since the discovery of the backlog, the use of the keyword “sexual assault” has increased by 30 percentage points where the use of the keyword “rape” has decreased by 39 percentage points. I argue that the backlog discovery exposed aspects of rape culture and this could have an impact on journalists working for the *Detroit Free Press*. It appears that the language these journalists use when describing and

coding their publications has shifted to adhere to the redefinition of rape as sexual assault under the reform.

In relation to the keyword, another aspect of language that I looked at was the subject of the headline. As I previously stated (see page 27 in Methodology) the subject of a sentence is meaningful as the rest of the information in the sentence is organized around it. There is potential for the victim as the subject in headlines of the *Detroit Free Press* to reinforce and perpetuate victim-blaming attitudes as it puts the focus on them. My results show that although there is a higher percentage of the offender as the subject than the victim for both years, there has not been a change of more than a few percentage points since 2008.

The following six categories of data were comparable to Michigan Incident Crime Reporting (MICR) (2008; 2016) data. Beginning with the gender of the victim, my results indicate that for both years there is an overrepresentation of victims who are men and an underrepresentation of victims who are women. However, this misrepresentation does shift closer to a more accurate representation of the sexual assault crime statistics by 2016. Over the course of this research, it became apparent that male victims are generally erased from the literature on sexual assault as it is believed that this would contradict theories that place sexual assault as a product of a patriarchal society. However, this erasure from the literature contributes to the idea that men cannot be victims of sexual assault. I would like to argue that this could be a factor in their overrepresentation within the *Detroit Free Press*. These assaults become “newsworthy” because uncommon, while women are underrepresented as there is pervasive suspicion and disbelief when they come forward. Furthermore, the under-representation of women could potentially resonate with female victims and survivors that their experience is not important or “news-worthy”. Finally, I would like to note that MICR (2008; 2016) data does not

provide information outside of the binary genders, and the *Detroit Free Press* did not publish any articles in 2008 or 2016 where the victim was trans or gender non-conforming. In the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (James, et al., 2016) it was found that trans and gender non-conforming people are especially vulnerable to sexual violence as 47% of the respondents in that study had been sexually assaulted. Therefore, I would argue that it is irresponsible and reckless of MICR (2008; 2016) to neglect non-cis-gender identities within their reports, and the complete erasure of trans people from the *Detroit Free Press* contributes to the silence and oppression that they experience every day.

The results for the age of the victim show that since 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* has become less representative of the age group “15-19” which is most vulnerable to victimization as MICR (2008; 2016) data suggests. MICR (2008; 2016) data shows that the three age groups used for this research, “under 14”, “15-19”, and “over 20”, experiences equal amounts of sexual assault. However, because 15-19 is much smaller age range than the other two, I can argue that individuals within this age category are more vulnerable than the others. The under representation of this age group could potentially have harmful effects on victims and survivors within this age group as well as their parents, teachers, coaches, employees, and other adults who are responsible for their safety. The age group “15-19” falls within the legal age of consent, so it is not “sensational” or “newsworthy” like the cases where the victim is under the legal consenting age. With already limited access to sexual health education that includes issues surrounding consent, strong support systems, and viable resources these victims are also less exposed to similar stories and shared experiences that could empower them to seek medical, legal, and emotional aid.

The relationship between the victim and the accused is a variable that complicates many sexual assault cases. Rape myths suggest that in cases of non-stranger or acquaintance sexual assault, the victim is making allegations out of guilt and vengeance (see page 14 in the Context Review). However, as MICR (2008; 2016) data suggests, reports of non-stranger sexual assault are much more common than reports where the accused is a stranger (80% and 8% in 2016). In both 2008 and 2016, cases where the victim did not know the accused was over-represented. However, this over-representation increased by 17 percentage points since 2008 moving further away from aligning itself with MICR (2008; 2016) data. I would argue that the consequences of this over-representation is monumental and maintains barriers that victims face when they are choosing whether to, or have, sought out legal support. The more representation of what rape myths perpetuate as a “real rape” contributes to victim-blaming of those who know the accused and limits our understanding of risk cues. When, in reality, victims assaulted by people they know is much more common than the “sensationalized” and “newsworthy” instances of “real rape” where victims are assaulted by a stranger who is deemed a violent monster.

The location of the assault is another variable that complicates many sexual assault cases and can intersect with the relationship to the accused. In instances where, for example, the accused was invited into the home of the victim there is less probability that this case will be reported and taken through to trial. In 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* under-represented sexual assault cases that occurred in a home or residence by 27 percentage points while over-representing sexual assault cases that occurred in a business by 28 percentage points. I argue that this could reinforce rape myths, as “real rape” is imagined to occur in public spheres outside of the victim’s home or residence. However, since 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* has become more aligned with the MICR (2016) data and the underrepresentation of sexual assault cases that

occurred in a home increased by 16 percentage points bringing it closer to the 84% of reported sexual assault cases that occurred within this private sphere.

My results from weapon use show that since 2008, the *Detroit Free Press* has become less representative of the presence or absence of a weapon. In 2016, weapon use was over-represented by 13 percentage points where non-weapon-use was under-represented by 25 percentage points. Similarly, the presence or absence of injury has also become less representative since 2008. In 2016, the presence of an injury was over-represented by 27 percentage points where the absence of an injury was under-represented by 46 percentage points. This adheres to rape myths as they maintain the idea that “real rape” is physically violent and the victim is expected to resist and do everything in their power to avoid completion of the assault which would result in obtaining injuries. What this myth does not account for is coercion, power, or threat of violence which does not always require physical violence from the suspect. However, what needs to be noted for both weapon and injury data from the *Detroit Free Press* is that this information is not always made to be explicitly clear. Frequencies of “unknown” are inherently higher than MICR (2008; 2016) data which may have affected its representation in comparison to reported sexual assault statistics. I cannot assume what it means when the journalist leaves this information out of their article, but why this information is excluded is an important question to ask and consider.

The over-representation and sensationalization of sexual assault cases that fit within what is considered a “real rape” reinforces rape myth acceptance. This is problematic as it leads to an overall dismissal of sexual assault cases in publications that deviate from this prototypical sexual assault. When news media uses rape myths to inform how they commentate on sexual assault this hinders discussion about the real causes of sexual violence (O’Hara, 2012, p. 256). Although

the perpetuation of rape myths may not be the explicit intent of the journalist or editorial staff, the use of them in response to sexual assault has devastating consequences for victims and survivors (Franiuk, Seefeldt, & Vandello, 2008, p. 791). Journalists, editors, and news media as a whole, should be reflexive and continuously strive to provide more accurate representations of sexual assault cases as reinforcement of rape myths not only finds its way into public opinion but also within policy-making and the criminal justice system (O'Hara, 2012, p. 248). To combat the issue of sexual and gender violence, news media outlets must provide an accurate representation of sexual assault cases and not just the violent and sensational stories that conform to rape myths (O'Hara, 2012, p. 257). This could result in a powerful impact on reporting, prosecution, and the conviction of offenders (Reddington, 1997, p. 247).

We owe victims and survivors of sexual assault, who have repeatedly been told that their experience is not valid because it does not conform to what is considered a “real rape”, greater representation within news media to show solidarity. This solidarity could contribute to the attitudinal change that is so necessary to dismantling rape culture and ensuring that all victims and survivors feel safe and are taken seriously when they seek victim services.

## Conclusion

Rape myth acceptance still thrives among the general populace. Despite the comprehensive 1974 legal reform of rape laws in Michigan, this rape myth acceptance infiltrates the criminal justice system and prejudice against the victim remains. Because news media is available for the public to consume, I analyzed how these sociopolitical institutions represent sexual assault cases and present evidence of how this representation reflects and may contribute to rape myth acceptance. When the backlog of nearly 11,000 untested sexual assault kits was discovered in Detroit, researchers, advocates, and organizers made it their mission to eliminate the backlog, create victim-centered notification protocol, and educate the public on sexual assault to dismantle rape myths that create barriers for victims to seek out services and receive the help that they need. Therefore, I undertook a content analysis of all sexual assault cases published in the *Detroit Free Press* in 2008 (the year before the discovery) and 2016 (the most recent full calendar year since the start of this research). My results showed that although there has been some progress, there is still an over-representation of sexual assault cases that conform to what is considered a “real rape”.

In regards to language, the keyword search showed very positive results where journalists working at the *Detroit Free Press* are moving away from using the term “rape”. However, the subject of the headline showed results that are consistent over time but are otherwise inconclusive because context was not taken into account. In regards to the variables that were comparable to Michigan Incident Crime Reporting (MICR) data (2008; 2016), the results have been mixed since 2008, but misrepresentative for both years as a whole. The gender of the victim, as well as the location of the assault, were the two variables that have become more representative of MICR (2008; 2016) data since the discovery of the backlog. The four other



variables—victim age, the relationship between the victim and the accused, and the presence or absence of a weapon or injury—have become less representative of MICR (2008; 2016) data since the discovery of the backlog. Perhaps this misrepresentation was not the intent of the journalist or the newspaper, but I argue that this over or under-representation could perpetuate, maintain, and reinforce rape myth acceptance within the general populace.

The misrepresentation found in the *Detroit Free Press* does not directly hinder individual victims and survivors in Detroit from obtaining justice. Although journalists at the *Detroit Free Press* may not be intentionally contribute to the perpetuation rape myths through misrepresentation, it does contribute to an environment of structural violence that impedes justice. A more accurate representation of sexual assault cases may contribute to discourse on sexual assault that accounts for all cases, even those that deviate away from what is considered “real rape”.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

A lot of data was collected over the course of this research; news articles were sourced and crime statistic data was referenced. The results show misrepresentation that I argue contributes to barriers to justice. It sends a message that only the victims who experience “real rape” are considered news worthy and see their case to trial. However, I recognize that this research was limited in how much it could reveal and understand about the reinforcement of rape myths within news media. In this section, I will describe these limitations and propose future directions of which this research can be infinitely built upon as well as ways in which I plan to disseminate the research that has already taken place.

This research was first limited by its reach. Of all the news media outlets of which could have been the subject under critical analysis, print news media is rapidly declining in terms of its

readership and influence on the general public. In selecting only one daily print newspaper, the *Detroit Free Press*, this analysis was especially narrow in who could access and be affected by this misrepresentation of sexual assault. Furthermore, when the *Detroit Free Press* is driven by capitalist efforts, the cases selected for publication need to provide the newspaper with the most readership possible to generate revenue. Similarly, this research was limited to the sexual assaults that were reported to law enforcement. This research accounts for only a fraction of sexual assault cases as for every news article, every report, and every untested sexual assault kit, there are many more victims who did not report their victimization to anyone. Therefore, the comparison of representation to MICR data is incomplete as the reality of the prevalence of sexual assault is unknown.

Another limitation is the differing jurisdictions that were used for this analysis. While the *Detroit Free Press* published articles on Detroit and its greater surrounding areas, reported sexual assaults were for all of Michigan. There were no publicly available and online sources for reported crime specific to Detroit, and thus the comparison was inherently flawed. However, state-level reports for sexual assault show common themes of who is the most vulnerable and which circumstances increase this vulnerability. Therefore, despite the differing jurisdictions used for this analysis, the comparison still represents the overall reality of sexual assault.

I was also limited in which information I could compare because of its availability through textual analysis of the *Detroit Free Press*. In Detroit, where 79% percent of the population is African American, and 35.7% of the inhabitants are living under the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), it can be hypothesized that many victims whose sexual assault kits were not submitted to the crime lab were poor Black women (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015, p. 152). Initially, it was my intent to compare victim race as this information was available

through MICR (2008; 2016) data, but the *Detroit Free Press* never explicitly stated race in any of the articles in my sample. However, it is important to note that MICR (2008; 2016) data for both years indicates that despite four-fifths of the population identifying as Black, this demographic only accounts for one-fifth of the victims that reported their victimization. It is difficult to believe, that in a city where the majority of the population is Black, the majority of victims of sexual assault are not. This informs a concern that hostile victim-blaming treatment, and thirty years of shelving their untested sexual assault kits, can disempower Black victims and survivors to report sexual assault. Hostile treatment is already experienced by women, transgender, and non-binary victims, but when race intersects with gender this treatment could be magnified to the extent that it is deterring non-White victims from reporting the assault. When rape culture informs criminal proceedings, the most vulnerable and marginalized populations are disproportionately disadvantaged.

A final limitation to this study is the lack of voice from the residents of Detroit who are subject to these messages, and from the journalists who unintentionally contribute to them. A contextual and qualitative analysis would have enriched the results from this research. To include the perspective of readers, non-readers, and employees of the *Detroit Free Press* as well as victim services and law enforcement personnel would have provided a well-rounded and conclusive study. While the content analysis does show overarching representation of key categories of data that make up conditions of a sexual assault case within articles published by the *Detroit Free Press*, it does not consider what is being said by the readers of this work, creators of this work, and the personal who are providing services to victims about these variables.

Although it would not have been conducive for me to undertake a qualitative approach because of time restraints, this perspective does lack from the analysis. I recognize that what has been concluded from my research is a partial and incomplete account that can be and should be infinitely researched. Therefore, this Detroit-specific research can be built upon through the use of other qualitative methods. However, it is important to recognize that this methodology can also be replicated for other cities, regions, or countries. Replication would require an understanding of the rape culture climate specific to the city in question as well as a point of reference to make a comparative analysis. Although most American cities have revealed a backlog of untested sexual assault kits, the post-Weinstein era and #MeToo movement mark a pivotal point where sexual assault and rape culture has been the forefront of every news source across North America, and therefore any location or news media outlet can be the potential subject of this methodology.

This research advocates that in order for a successful shift in attitudes surrounding discourse on sexual assault, knowledge needs to be disseminated to the general public. To achieve this, I will be working to share my research to the public in accessible ways as well as to academic circles. The first initiative will be to create a small self-published and self-circulated zine that addresses the misrepresentation of sexual assault within the *Detroit Free Press*. Print copies and download codes for the electronic version will be sold by donation through an online platform for creators to sell their products as well as at local Windsor and Detroit book and zine fairs. All proceeds from this initiative will be donated to Wayne County Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program (WC SAFE). WC SAFE is a non-profit organization in Detroit that provides free trauma-informed and survivor-centered services for victims of all ages and gender identities. This way, everyone has access to the zine despite what they can afford to pay for it, and the

money that is made from this goes directly to the victims and survivors in Detroit. Following this, I will rework this thesis into a journal article and submit it for publication to a scholarly feminist journal that is free, online, and accessible to those even outside of academic circles. Upon publication, I will send the article to the *Detroit Free Press* requesting a critical analysis of how they contribute to rape culture and how to better inform the public on this crime while being sensitive to the impact it can have on victims and survivors that read this newspaper. These dissemination goals will work together to ensure that the scope of this research is as far as it can possibly reach as this is critical for making meaningful change.

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## Appendix A: Coding Legend

*Table A: Coding legend*

	0	1	2
Keyword	sexual assault	rape	both
Headline Subject	victim	accused	N/A
Victim Gender	woman	man	
Victim Age	under 14	15-19	over 20
Victim-Accused			
Relationship	non-stranger	stranger	unknown
Location of Assault	home/residence	business/establishment	public/outside
Weapon	none	yes	unknown
Injury	none	yes	unknown
SAK	mentioned	not mentioned	
Serial Offender	yes	unknown	

Appendix B: Raw Data from the *Detroit Free Press*

Table B1.1: 2008 Data collection

Case #	Keyword	Headline Subject	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location of Assault	Weapon	Injury
1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
3	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	2
4	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
5	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	2
7	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
8	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
9	2	0	0	2	1	2	1	0
10	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
11	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
12	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
13	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
14	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
15	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
16	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
17	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
18	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
19	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
20	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
21	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
22	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
23	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
24	2	1	0	2	1	2	1	2
25	2	1	0	2	1	0	2	2
26	1	1	0	2	1	0	2	2
27	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	0
28	0	1	1	0	2		2	2
29	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
30	1	2	0	2	1	0	1	1
31	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	1
32	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0
33	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
34	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1

35	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2
36	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	2
37	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	2
38	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2
39	1	1	0	2	1	2	1	2
40	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	2
41	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	2
42	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	2
43	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	2
44	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2
45	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
46	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	0

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables

Table B1.2: 2008 Data frequencies

Code	Keyword	Headline Subject	Victim Gender	Victim Age	V-A RS	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	14	9	34	16	37	26	19	22
1	22	19	12	17	8	15	21	7
2	10	18		13	1	4	6	17
total	46	46	46	46	46	45	46	46

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, V-A = Victim-Accused, RS = Relationship.

Table B1. 3: 2008 Data frequencies in percentage

Code	Keyword	Headline Subject	Victim Gender	Victim Age	V-A RS	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	30.43%	19.57%	73.91%	34.78%	80.43%	57.78%	41.30%	47.83%
1	47.83%	41.30%	26.09%	36.96%	17.39%	33.33%	45.65%	15.22%
2	21.74%	39.13%		28.26%	2.17%	8.89%	13.04%	36.96%
total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, V-A = Victim-Accused, RS = Relationship.

Table B2.1: 2016 Data collection

Case #	Keyword	Headline Subject	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location of Assault	Weapon	Injury
1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	1
2	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
3	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
4	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
5	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
6	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
7	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
8	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
9	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
10	2	2	0	1	2	1	1	0
11	1	0	2	0	0	2	2	1
12	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	1
13	2	2	0	1	2	1	1	0
14	0	0	2	0	0	2	2	1
15	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	1
16	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	1
17	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
18	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
19	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	1
20	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
21	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	1
22	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
23	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	1
24	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
25	1	0	2	1	0	2	2	1
26	2	0	2	1	0	1	2	0
27	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	0
28	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	1
29	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	1
30	2	0	2	0	0	2	1	0
31	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
32	1	0	2	1	0	1	2	0
33	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0
34	1	0	0	0		0	0	1
35	1	2	2	1	0	1	1	1
36	0	2	2	0	0	1	1	1
37	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	1
38	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0

39	1	0	0	0		0	0	1
40	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
41	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
42	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1
43	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	1
44	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	1
45	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
46	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables.

Table B2.2: 2016 Data frequencies

Code	Keyword	Headline Subject	Victim Gender	Victim Age	V-A RS	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	28	8	41	17	28	32	15	14
1	4	19	5	6	16	3	23	22
2	14	19		23	2	9	8	10
total	46	46	46	46	46	44	46	46

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, V-A = Victim-Accused, RS = Relationship.

Table B2.3: 2016 Data frequencies in percentage

Code	Keyword	Headline Subject	Victim Gender	Victim Age	V-A RS	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	60.87%	17.39%	89.13%	36.96%	60.87%	72.73%	32.61%	30.43%
1	8.70%	41.30%	10.87%	13.04%	34.78%	6.82%	50.00%	47.83%
2	30.43%	41.30%		50.00%	4.35%	20.45%	17.39%	21.74%
total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, V-A = Victim-Accused, RS = Relationship.

## Appendix C: Michigan Incident Crime Reporting Statistics

*Table C1.1: 2008 MICR data*

Code	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	4472	1779	4163	3604	2338	3471
1	194	1530	390	204	2151	1195
2		1329	776	427	177	
total	4666	4638	5329	4235	4666	4666

*Note.* Refer to Table A for raw variables, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting Statistics, adapted from MICR (2008).

*Table C1.2: 2008 MICR data in percentage*

Code	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	95.84%	38.36%	78.12%	85.10%	50.11%	74.39%
1	4.16%	32.99%	7.32%	4.82%	46.10%	25.61%
2		28.65%	14.56%	10.08%	3.79%	
total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

*Note.* Refer to Table A for raw variables, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting Statistics, adapted from MICR (2008).



Table C2.1: 2016 MICR data

Code	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	4228	1409	3577	3369	2507	3356
1	138	1390	341	217	1619	1010
2		1551	562	437	240	
total	4366	4350	4480	4023	4366	4366

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting Statistics, adapted from MICR (2016).

Table C2.2: 2016 MICR data in percentage

Code	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	96.84%	32.39%	79.84%	83.74%	57.42%	76.87%
1	3.16%	31.95%	7.61%	5.39%	37.08%	23.13%
2		35.66%	12.54%	10.86%	5.50%	
total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting Statistics, adapted from MICR (2016).

Appendix D: Comparing 2008 to 2016

Table D1: Comparing 2008 to 2016 data from the Detroit Free Press

Code	Keyword	Headline Subject	Victim Gender	Victim Age	V-A RS	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	30.43	-2.17	15.22	2.17	-19.57	14.95	-8.70	-17.39
1	-39.13	0.00	-15.22	-23.91	17.39	-26.52	4.35	32.61
2	8.70	2.17		21.74	2.17	11.57	4.35	-15.22

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), a positive value means that the representation increased from 2008 to 2016 and a negative value means the representation decreased from 2008 to 2016, V-A = Victim-Accused, RS = Relationship.

Table D2: Comparing 2008 MICR statistics to 2008 data from the Detroit Free Press

Code	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	-21.93	-3.57	2.32	-27.32	-8.80	-26.56
1	21.93	3.97	10.07	28.52	-0.45	-10.39
2		-0.39	-12.39	-1.19	9.25	

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting Statistics.

Table D3: Comparing 2016 MICR statistics to 2016 data from the Detroit Free Press

Code	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	-7.71	4.57	-18.97	-11.02	-24.81	-46.43
1	7.71	-18.91	27.17	1.42	12.92	24.69
2		14.34	-8.20	9.59	11.89	

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is more than MICR data and a negative value means the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* is less than MICR data, MICR = Michigan Incident Crime Reporting Statistics.

Table D4: Comparing the results from Table D2 and D3

Code	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Victim-Accused Relationship	Location	Weapon	Injury
0	14.22	8.14	-21.29	16.31	-16.01	-19.87
1	-14.22	-22.88	17.10	-27.09	13.37	35.09
2		14.74	4.19	10.79	2.64	

Note. Refer to Table A for raw variables, data is shown in absolute difference (percentage points), a positive value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has increased since 2008, and a negative value means that the representation in the *Detroit Free Press* compared to MICR data in 2016 has decreased since 2008.

### Vita Auctoris

Nikki A. Basset was born in 1992 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. They graduated from Dakota Collegiate Institute in 2010. From there, they went on to the University of Manitoba where they obtained a B.A. (hons.) in Anthropology in 2015. They presented their undergraduate research as a poster at the annual Canadian Association for Physical Anthropology conference in Fall 2015. They are currently a candidate for a Master's degree in Criminology at the University of Windsor hoping to graduate in Spring 2018.