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# Nationwide Newspaper Coverage of Rape and Rape Culture on College Campuses: Testing Community Structure Theory

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## Introduction

For centuries, the topic of sexual assault, specifically rape, has been taboo. Only recently has the silence been broken, the topic of rape and rape culture now addressed as a public issue deserving attention. Rape can happen to anyone at any time, even at locations that should offer protection, such as the seemingly safe bubble of a college campus. “Among undergraduate students, 23.1% of females and 5.4% of males experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation” (Conoscenti and McNally 2006). Sometimes, these cases are surfaced and exposed via media, but coverage can raise ambiguities about the “true victims” of rape, generating concern for media scrutiny that might deter rape victims from speaking up to seek justice. Although “human rights” as an umbrella concept may receive relatively little attention in US media, specific types of rights

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violations can indeed attract media interest, including a subset of threats to women's physical integrity rights: campus rape and rape culture. Investigating coverage of that issue can illuminate larger questions about the extent of media "responsibility" for coverage of human rights generally.

With so many instances of rape and rape culture on college campuses, media coverage can be controversial; media may present some perspectives or narratives as more reasonable than others, a practice known as "framing" (Pollock 2007, 17–27). Within this context, this study categorizes coverage of campus rape and rape culture in two major frames and one residual "balanced/neutral" frame. One major frame represents an "authoritative" responsibility perspective, empathizing with victims of rape on college campuses, illuminating the role of formal, official institutions such as governments and college and university institutions taking action in areas they might otherwise have ignored. An opposing frame is a more traditional or "non-authoritative" responsibility viewpoint, sometimes suggesting that sexual assault allegation statistics may be inflated and inaccurate and that in any case, the issue is best left to "society"—individuals, families, nonprofits, and others. From a policy or regulatory perspective, the "authoritative" frame is important, because it implies urgency and the need for some kind of official oversight, resembling the current campus expansion of Title IX provisions, originally intended to protect women's athletic rights, now expanded to encompass a wide range of women's campus rights generally.

The use of "authoritative" and "non-authoritative" frames is an original contribution of this study. Previous studies using community structure theory have generally distinguished between "favorable" and "unfavorable" frames, or "government responsibility" and "society responsibility" (See Pollock 2007, 2013a, 2015). Since universities and colleges may be private or government-related, it was decided that the "government" frame was too narrow to encompass the "institutional" or "official" responsibility of higher educational institutions of all kinds, so a broader "authoritative" frame was adopted and juxtaposed against a "non-authoritative" frame, which describes the role of unofficial, volunteer, and nonprofit entities in addressing campus rape and rape culture.

In this study, newspapers are used as primary sources in order to examine media coverage of rape and rape culture on college campuses. It is crucial that newspapers be examined because of their function as a primary source of information for well-educated and political and economic elites. Newspapers are also notorious intermedia agenda-setters, serving as guides for broadcast, online, and radio journalists for the most important topics to cover each day. Overall, newspapers are optimal sources of analysis for coverage of rape on college campuses and other controversial issues, because they promote discussion and serve as community forums.

This exploration of coverage of campus rape and rape culture will employ community structure theory. The community structure approach is defined as "a form of quantitative content analysis that focuses on the ways in which key characteristics of communities such as cities are related to the content coverage of newspapers in those communities" (Pollock 2007, 23). Two key questions guide this study: How much variation occurs in news coverage of rape and rape culture of college campuses in US cities? How closely linked is that variation to differences in community characteristics?

## Literature Review

In order to scrutinize newspaper coverage of rape and rape culture nationwide, scholarly literatures in a several fields including communication studies, sociology, gender studies, and psychology were analyzed. Despite an abundance of information from other fields, few results were encountered when exploring rape and rape culture in the field of communication studies, underscoring the need for more attention to this topic among communication scholars.

### Rape and Rape Culture Coverage in Communication Studies and Other Disciplines

A search for the term “rape” in the communication studies database Com Abstracts yielded 149 results. These articles were centered on the topic of rape and not necessarily relevant to rape/rape culture on college campuses. A search for “rape on college campuses” did not result in any articles. “Rape and coverage” yielded 15 articles, including one on college and university rape scandals, discussing the Duke University lacrosse scandal. Duke University was thrust into a crisis when three members of its lacrosse team were indicted on charges of first degree rape and sexual assault, according to Fortunato’s study (2008). The other 14 results were not specific to the topic of rape and rape culture on college campuses.

Searches were also conducted in the Communication & Mass Media Complete database, yielding 67 results using the search terms “rape” and “college or universities.” One study focused on the new campaign, “Never Go Out Alone,” helping prevent college students from being on campus alone at late hours, and offered an analysis of college rape prevention tips (Bedera and Nordmeyer 2015). An additional study by Suran (2014) addressed improvements to Title IX on college campuses. None of the articles specifically addressed the topic of media coverage of rape or rape culture on campuses.

In contrast to the field of communication studies, sociology, gender studies, and psychology yielded substantially more results. One sociological study explored the risk of rape women experience at college fraternities (Boswell and Spade 1996), comparing fraternities and bars that students at a private college identified as places with either high or low risk for rape, concluding that certain settings strongly promote sexually aggressive behavior and that rape should not be viewed as an isolated act. An article from the gender studies literature discussed ongoing investigations of university incompetence at handling reports of sexual assault. Ninety-seven investigations at 94 universities have taken place regarding violations of Title IX (Edwards 2015). One notable article from the psychology databases examined sports media exposure and its influence on college students’ beliefs surrounding rape myths, as well as on their intentions to intervene in a sexual assault. Among women alone, the study found a positive association between exposure to sports media and rape myth acceptance (Barglow 2014).

Media coverage of campus rape and rape culture is clearly a well-researched topic in fields other than communication studies. By contrast, a stark absence of communication studies research is apparent on the topic. This investigation is an attempt to begin filling that information gap regarding coverage of campus rape and rape culture. Grounding this examination in Community Structure Theory provides a useful lens to understand how localities influence media coverage of rape and rape culture.

## Community Structure Theory

As noted by Cook (2017, p. 1), “Community structure theory provides a powerful framework for analyzing society’s influence on media coverage.” It has been identified by Funk and McCombs (2017) as the “conceptual inverse” of agenda-setting, focusing on demographic characteristics of communities shaping news instead of news as a driver of public perception. Robert Park first initiated the community structure approach at the University of Chicago, during the early twentieth century, but over the years, this theory has been further established and refined (Park 1992). Park believed that scholars should examine not only how media influence society but also how society influences media.

Incorporating Park’s approach, three scholars from the University of Minnesota—Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien—furthered developed studies of “structural pluralism,” finding that coverage in larger cities was more “pluralistic” due to the greater social diversity found in larger metropolitan areas (1973, 1980). A limitation of these studies is that media coverage was sampled mainly in cities in Minnesota rather than nationwide. The three scholars later crafted what is known as the “guard dog” hypothesis (Donohue et al. 1995), which emphasizes media’s reinforcement and protection of elite interests rather than the interests of the public (Pollock 2007, 24).

In contrast, Hindman (1999) found that media in one or few cities would reflect the interests not of elites but rather of dominant ethnic groups (1999). Similarly, McLeod and Hertog (1992, 1999) found that favorable media coverage in cities can reflect the size of protest groups. Demers and Viswanath also assembled a research collection, finding that “mainstream mass media are agents both of social control for dominant institutions and value systems” and of social change (1999, 34).

Pollock and colleagues advanced this structural approach three steps further. First, by conducting the first large studies of nationwide and cross-national samples, they could gather content from critical events that linked multiple city or national-level structural characteristics to variations in newspaper coverage. Second, they combined measures of both article “content” and article “prominence” to create a single, sensitive composite content analysis score called a “Media Vector.” Third, although Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien argued that media typically serve as “guard dogs” for political or economic elites (Donohue et al. 1995), Pollock et. al.’s studies in *Tilted Mirrors: Media Alignment with Political and Social Change—A Community Structure Approach* (2007), *Media and Social Inequality: Innovations in Community Structure Research* (2013b) and *Journalism and Human Rights: How Demographics Drive Media Coverage* (2015) often confirm that media can mirror the interests of society’s most “vulnerable” citizens. Regarding the contribution of community structure theory, it is instructive that scholars using a systematic empirical study have found that community structure predictions compare favorably with those made by agenda-setting theory (Funk and McCombs 2017).

## Hypotheses

To examine media coverage of rape and rape culture, three umbrella hypotheses were constructed based on previous Community Structure Theory studies (Pollock 2007): buffer, vulnerability, and stakeholder.

## Buffer Hypothesis

The “buffer” hypothesis expects that the higher the percentage of privileged groups in a city, the more likely a city’s newspaper is to cover human rights issues favorably (Pollock 2007, p. 52). Pollock’s 2007 book, *Tilted Mirrors*, explains that “the more individuals in a city who are ‘buffered’ from scarcity or uncertainty, the more likely they are to accord legitimacy to those who articulate their concerns in human rights frames” (Pollock 2007, p. 62). At the city level, measures of privilege are categorized by the following criteria: percentage of college-educated, percentage of families with annual incomes of \$100,000 or more, and percentage with professional/technical occupational status in a city. The buffer hypothesis asserts that the security these privileged groups experience is linked to generosity toward less privileged groups, which are less “buffered” from danger and economic insecurity (Pollock and Haake 2010; Pollock et al. 1995).

Several community structure studies confirm the buffer hypothesis. Vales et al. (2014, 2015) found that the higher the percent college educated, the higher the percent with family income of \$100,000+, and the higher percent of professionals in a city, the more favorable the coverage of same-sex marriage. Favorable coverage of gays in the Boy Scouts was also linked to higher proportions of college-educated and families with incomes of \$100,000+ (Pollock 2007, 231-248). A contrasting study by Pollock et al. (2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b) found that the higher the percent of these privileged groups, the less media emphasis on government responsibility for posttraumatic stress. Yet abundance of “professional” occupations in a city in a more recent study was predictably linked to greater media emphasis on government responsibility for PTSD (Goldman et al. 2016), confirming the buffer hypothesis.

Consistently, a study regarding the Thomas-Hill judicial hearings found that the higher percent privileged individuals in a city, the more favorable the coverage of Anita Hill’s sexual harassment charges (Pollock 2007, 66–75), and cities containing higher populations of economically and educationally privileged groups (Pollock 2007, 231–488) were also associated with more favorable coverage of physician-assisted suicide (Pollock 2007, 86). Based on this literature supporting a “buffer” perspective, the following hypotheses linking community privilege and formal, authoritative responsibility (from government or campus authorities) for campus rape and rape culture are reasonable:

*H1a: The greater the percentage of college-educated in a city, the more media support for authoritative (official, formal) responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

*H1b: The greater the percentage of families with incomes of \$100,000 or more, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

## Healthcare Access

Health care access, defined by “the proportion of the municipal budget that a city spends on health care, in addition to the availability of hospital beds and physicians”

(Pollock 2007, 9), is an important supplement to the buffer hypothesis. The health care access hypothesis links greater access to healthcare with progressive developments in coverage of healthcare delivery. Just as the buffer hypothesis associates privilege with progressive coverage and empathy for human rights issues, the health care access hypothesis connects privilege in communities with progressive coverage and advances regarding health broadly defined to encompass multiple issues. Several studies support this relationship.

Community structure studies found that the higher the number of physicians per 100,000 residents, the more favorable the newspaper coverage of stem cell research (Pollock 2007), physician-assisted suicide (Pollock and Yulis 2004), and pediatric immunization (Trotochaud et al. 2015), and the less favorable the coverage of solitary confinement (Pollock et al. 2017). Another study by Peraria et al. (2015) confirmed that the larger the number of hospital beds per 100,000 in a city, the greater the media emphasis on military rape adjudication outside the chain of command, a progressive position. More physicians and hospital beds are both associated with media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for gun safety (Patel et al. 2017).

The issue of rape and rape culture on college campuses is relevant to healthcare, because gender discrimination affects proper access to healthcare. Based on previous studies, it is reasonable to expect that cities strongly concerned with citizens' health and well-being will exhibit more favorable coverage of authoritative responsibility for campus rape and rape culture.

*H2a: The greater the number of physicians per 100,000 people, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (State and Metropolitan Area Data Book 2010)*

*H2b: The greater number of hospital beds per 100,000 people, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2010).*

*H2c: The greater the percentage of municipal spending on healthcare, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2010).*

## **Vulnerability Hypothesis**

The second umbrella hypothesis is the vulnerability hypothesis, which predicts connections between economically disadvantaged groups such as the poor, unemployed, and those in high-crime areas and the media coverage reflecting their interests (Pollock 2007). The vulnerability hypothesis expects that cities with higher percentages who are disadvantaged will display more media coverage directed toward “vulnerable groups’ concerns” (Pollock 2007, 137). The vulnerability hypothesis challenges the conventional “guard dog” hypothesis created by Donohue et al. (1995), which states that interests of political and economic elites are usually supported by media and newspaper reporting. In multiple Pollock et al. studies, by contrast, results often reveal that media coverage “mirrors” the interests of poor or unemployed groups (Pollock 2007, p. 101,137).

Levels of poverty were examined in a variety of studies. In four of them, high poverty levels were correlated with more coverage reflecting the interests of vulnerable groups, whether legislation supporting a Patient's Bill of Rights or immigration reform or legalization of abortion (Roe v. Wade 1973), as well as coverage supporting government responsibility for suicide prevention (respectively, Pollock 2007, 151; Pollock et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b; Pollock et al. 1978; Swartz et al. 2016). Other studies found that higher the unemployment levels in a city, the more media support for genetically modified food, reflecting the interests of those with lower incomes in obtaining more affordable food (Pollock et al. 2010, p. 51–75), universal healthcare (Kiernicki et al., 2013) or security surveillance (Moran et al. 2017), and military rape adjudication “outside the chain of command,” a progressive position (Marr et al. 2016). High homicide rates in a city were also correlated with more favorable coverage of military rape adjudication “outside of the chain of command” (Peraria et al. 2015), more favorable coverage of transgender rights (Buonauro et al. 2017), and more media emphasis on government responsibility for campus suicide prevention (Swartz et al. 2016). High rates of hate crime were additionally associated with media support for immigration reform (Borowski et al. 2017). All cited studies confirmed strong associations between measures of vulnerability and coverage supporting the interests of society's most marginal populations.

In this current study, rape and rape culture on college campuses can be viewed as an indicator of vulnerability, in particular in urban areas (Breslau et al. 2004, 531). Newspaper coverage in less advantaged communities is predicted to be more supportive toward authoritative responsibility (suggesting support for policy proposals or regulation) regarding rape and rape culture on college campuses. Thus:

*H3a: The greater the percent below the poverty level in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2010).*

*H3b: The greater the percentage unemployed in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2010).*

*H3c: The higher the homicide rate in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2010).*

*H3d: The higher the hate crime rate in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2010).*

*H3e: The greater the percent of unmarried births in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2010).*

### Stakeholder Hypothesis

The third umbrella hypothesis in this study is the stakeholder hypothesis, which expects a connection between stakeholder size and favorable coverage of

stakeholder concerns (Pollock 2007, 172; McLeod and Hertog 1999). Tichenor et al. (1980) discovered that the larger the city size, the greater the plurality of viewpoints presented by media (Pollock 2007, 171). When focusing on rape and rape culture on college campuses, several stakeholder categories can be employed, including women's empowerment, political partisanship, belief system, and position in life cycle.

### *Women's Empowerment*

From conventional wisdom, women may be more sympathetic to human rights actions because of gender inequalities faced daily. Women's employment is one crucial stakeholder. Three studies suggest that the higher percent of women in the workforce, the more favorable the coverage of immigration reform (Borowski et al. 2017), human cloning (Pollock et al. 2000), and transgender rights (Buonauro et al. 2017).

Similarly, higher percentages of women in the workforce were linked to favorable coverage of the two wage-earner Eappens family, whose child was killed by the family's "British nanny" (Pollock et al. 1999). Finally, higher percentages of college-educated women in a city are connected to coverage favoring immigration reform (Borowski et al. 2017).

Rape has become a major public issue, in particular on college campuses, and reporting on the topic can generate great emotion and sympathy for women. Similar to the buffer hypothesis, higher proportions of more privileged women (working and college-educated women) are associated with media emphasizing authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. Accordingly:

*H4a: The greater the percentage of women in the workforce, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (County and City Extra 2012).*

*H4b: The greater the percentage of college-educated women in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

### *Political Identity*

A strong sense of political partisanship across the country can render political affiliation an influential stakeholder. Higher percentages of Democratic voters have been associated with less favorable coverage of trying juveniles as adults (Pollock 2007, p. 204) and with more favorable coverage of same-sex marriage (Vales et al. 2014, 2015). The opposite pattern was found for Republican voters.

Similar studies found that the higher percent voting Democratic, the more favorable the coverage of pediatric immunization and transgender rights, and close to the topic of this study, more media emphasis on government responsibility for rape post-traumatic stress (respectively, Trotochaud et al. 2015; Buonauro et al. 2017; and Kim et al. 2017), with the opposite holding for Republican voters. Democratic voters are generally affiliated with more progressive viewpoints, believing that health care and other welfare programs can be universalized with less focus on financial

considerations. Meanwhile, Republicans tend to oppose programs that involve government spending on “entitlements” or “vulnerable” groups. The following are thus expected:

*H6a: The higher the percentage voting Democratic in the last presidential election, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

*H6b: The higher the percentage voting Republican in the last presidential election, the less media support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

### *Belief System*

Particular religious beliefs and values may contribute to coverage of critical issues in newspapers. Pollock, Robinson, and Murray (1978) found that cities with higher percentages of Catholics were associated with less favorable coverage of legalizing abortion in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision to legalize abortion. Additionally, cities with higher proportions of devotional readers, those relying on literal interpretations of the Bible, were associated with less favorable coverage of embryonic stem cell research (Pollock 2007), gays in the Boy Scouts (Pollock 2007), transgender rights (Buonauro et al. 2017), and immigration reform (Borowski et al. 2017). Furthermore, less favorable coverage of same-sex marriage (Vales et al. 2014, 2015) and transgender rights (Buonauro et al. 2017), and more favorable coverage of security surveillance (Moran et al. 2017) were encountered in cities with higher percentages of Evangelicals.

Recent research, however, has encountered some changes. Cities with higher percentages of Catholics were associated with more favorable coverage of same-sex marriage and same-sex adoptions (Pollock and Haake 2010), transgender rights (Buonauro et al. 2017), gays in the Boy Scouts (Pollock 2007, p. 243), and immigration reform (Borowski et al. 2017). Furthermore, cities with higher percentages of Catholics were connected with greater media emphasis on military rape adjudication claims “outside” the chain of command (Peraria et al. 2015) and (for an earlier sample than the present study) on government responsibility for eradicating rape and rape culture on college campuses (Soya et al. 2015).

Similarly, Pollock (2013, p. 1–30) found that the higher the percentage of Mainline Protestants in a city, the more favorable the coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York and of detainee rights at Guantanamo Bay (Zinck et al. 2014, 2015), and the less favorable the coverage of solitary confinement (Pollock and Street et al. 2017), as well as more media emphasis on government responsibility for animal cruelty (Machado et al. 2016).

Accordingly, analyzing relationships between proportions belonging to specific belief systems and coverage of rape on college campuses generates several hypotheses:

*H7a: The greater the percentage of Evangelicals in a city, the less media support for authoritative responsibility for rape on college campuses (Association of Religion Data Archives 2010).*

*H7b: The greater the percentage of devotional readers in a city, the less media support for authoritative responsibility for rape on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

*H7c: The greater the percentage of Catholics in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

*H7d: The greater the percentage of Mainline Protestants in a city, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape on college campuses (Association of Religion Data Archives 2010).*

### *Position in Life-Cycle*

Another element affecting newspaper coverage is the mixture of families with children of different ages within a community. Mink et al. (2001) explored coverage of the return of Elian Gonzalez's to his father in Cuba, finding the higher the percentage of families with children ages 5 to 7 (Elian's age range) in a US city, the more favorable the coverage of the young boy's return to Cuba. Similarly, the higher the percent of families with young children 5–10, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for campus suicide prevention (Swartz et al. 2016), and higher percentages of families with children under five corresponded with media emphasis on government responsibility for animal rights (Machado et al. 2016).

Regarding families with teenagers, a study by Pollock (2007, 172–183) found that the higher the percentage of families with children ages 13 to 15, and 16 to 18, the less favorable the coverage of gun control, correlations suggesting that families with teen children are less likely to look to formal authorities such as the government or police to provide regulations on perceived danger or threats. However, coverage of rape PTS may envision younger children less at risk than older, teenage children. A recent study found higher percentages of families with children 11–15 in a city linked to coverage emphasizing government responsibility for rape PTS, suggesting children's proximity to risk may be connected to responsive media content (Kim et al. 2017). Families with teens and young adults may be linked to more progressive concerns because for rape and rape culture on campuses, older children are more at risk. Thus:

*H8a: The greater the percentage of families with children aged 11 to 15 years old in a population, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

*H8b: The greater the percentage of families with children aged 16 to 18 years old in a population, the more media support for authoritative responsibility for rape on college campuses (Lifestyle Market Analyst 2008).*

## **Methodology**

To explore coverage of rape and rape culture on campuses, a nationwide cross-section sample of 21 prominent newspapers was selected from the NewsBank database. The collection contained all news or feature articles (excluding editorials or letters to the editor)

of 250+ words with the search terms in the headline or first paragraph in the sample period relevant to campus rape and rape culture, resulting in 426 total articles. The following major publications were sampled: *The Atlanta Journal*, *The Boston Herald*, *The Buffalo News*, *the Charlotte Observer*, *the Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Denver Post*, *The Deseret News*, *The Detroit News*, *the Houston Chronicle*, *the Omaha World-Herald*, *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *The Plain Dealer*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *the Star Tribune: Newspaper of Two Cities*, *The State*, *the St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *The Times*, *Picayune*, and *the Wisconsin State Journal*. The sample of articles in this study covered all four major regions. A larger sample of newspapers was drawn initially, but other newspapers in the larger sample were ultimately excluded because so few articles (less than 10 per newspaper) were encountered in the sample period. Newspapers with nationwide readerships including *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* were not included, because they target nationwide rather than local audiences.

The inception point of our data collection was March 13, 2006, the year that three of Duke University's lacrosse players were charged with sexual assault on their campus. The sample period ended June 2, 2016, when Brock Turner, former swimmer at Stanford University, received a sentence for sexually assaulting an innocent victim. His legal sentence sparked nationwide outrage at what many perceived as a short sentence, generating substantial media coverage.

### Article Prominence

Each article was assigned two assessments. The first score evaluated "prominence." Prominence registers the significance of the article to an editor. Each article was evaluated with a number between 3 and 16 based on four elements: placement, headline size, article length, and photos/graphics if any were included. Articles with a higher number of points received a greater prominence score. Below, Table 1 demonstrates the scoring in more detail.

### Article Direction

In addition to "prominence," articles were also analyzed for content "direction," representing how articles were framed. Articles were coded for their emphasis on either "authoritative" or "non-authoritative" responsibility for handling campus rape cases. A

**Table 1** Prominence score\* for coding databases

Dimension	4	3	2	1
Placement	Front page first section	Front page inside section	Inside page first section	Other
Headline size (# of words)	10+	9–8	7–6	5 or fewer
Article length (# of words)	1000+	750–999	500–749	250–499
Photos/graphics	2 or more	1		

\*copyright John C. Pollock, 1994–2018

“balanced/neutral” direction was also awarded to articles with coverage emphasizing neither authoritative nor non-authoritative responsibility. Additionally, those articles that simply presented facts or statistics unrelated to directional perspectives on the subject were also regarded as balanced/neutral.

### *Authoritative Responsibility*

Articles emphasizing the importance of “official” or “formal” (government or institutional university or college) responsibility for rape victims on campuses were coded “authoritative responsibility.” This coverage was assigned to articles that covered legislation, legal proceedings, or regulations regarding rape and rape culture on campuses. For example, an article in *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* focusing on charges against Duke Lacrosse players was regarded as authoritative, because it reported on legal action inside a courtroom (Whitmire 2006, A1).

Another example of authoritative responsibility in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* discussed The College of New Jersey’s (TCNJ) new regulation on sexual activity and consent (Lai and Platoff 2015, 7). This article was coded as authoritative responsibility, because it reported on new regulations and policies regarding consent, helping address rape, and rape culture on college campuses.

### *Non-authoritative Responsibility*

Articles that stressed the role of society—“unofficial” or “informal”—activities over the role of authorities regarding rape and rape culture on campuses were coded as “non-authoritative” responsibility. The “non-authoritative” category encapsulates charities, non-profits, individuals, and families within its collective identity. An article in *The San Francisco Chronicle* focused on emotional outrage expressed through protests and social media toward the outcome of the Stanford rape case involving student Brock Turner (Asimov 2016, A1). The university community protested on multiple social media platforms, thus the article was coded “non-authoritative.” A second example expressing a non-authoritative viewpoint came from *The Denver Post*, focusing on society’s reaction to disrespectful comments made to a rape victim on social media (Petty 2013, 18A).

### *Balanced/Neutral*

Any articles that emphasized neither authoritative nor non-authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on campuses were coded as “balanced/neutral.”

Additionally, articles that neglected to state expressly a position on the issue of rape and rape culture on campuses, but still offered relevant facts or statistics, were coded as “balanced/neutral.” For example, an article in *The Buffalo News* focused on a rape claim made in Niagara County without a filed report (Tokasz 2015, A1). The article was coded as balanced/neutral due to the non-partisan nature of the presented information.

A total of 288 of the 426 articles collected (68%) were read by two coders, resulting in a Scott’s Pi coefficient of inter-coder reliability of .806.

## Calculating a Media Vector

Examining 21 newspapers from cities across the country, a “Media Vector” was calculated using the Janis-Fadner coefficient of imbalance. Each newspaper’s article prominence was combined with its directional scores into a single composite measure of article “projection” onto audiences (Pollock 2007, p. 49). Media vector scores lie on a spectrum from  $-1.00$  to  $+1.00$ . A score between  $0$  and  $+1.00$  reflected coverage emphasizing authoritative responsibility for campus rape and rape culture. A score between  $0$  and  $-1.00$  represented coverage emphasizing non-authoritative responsibility. Table 2 is a depiction of this media vector formula. Regarding statistical procedures, Pearson correlations and regression analysis were used to examine relationships between metropolitan area demographics and media vectors.

## Results

This study examined newspaper coverage of rape and rape culture on college campuses, comparing media vectors from 21 cities from the period of March, 2006 to June, 2016. The highest media vector was from Boston with  $.7639$ , while the lowest media vector came from Minneapolis with  $-.0330$ , for an overall media vector range of  $0.7969$ , showing a wide range of coverage of the issue of college campus rape, with most cities leaning toward authoritative responsibility: Of 21 sampled cities, 17 (80.95%) of media vectors emphasized authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. Table 3 offers a complete list of the media vector scores, listed from most positive to most negative.

In order to explore level of media consensus among regions, media vector scores were averaged to aggregate each region’s newspapers. Although a one-way ANOVA reveals no statistically significant differences among the four regions, these results (Table 4) all reflect authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. Strikingly, the Midwest leads with a media vector of  $.3187$ , the highest regional support for authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. This finding was somewhat

**Table 2** Media vector formula

$a$  = sum of the prominence scores coded “authoritative responsibility”

$n$  = sum of the prominence scores coded “non-authoritative responsibility”

$b$  = sum of the prominence scores coded “balanced/neutral”

$$r = a + n + b$$

If  $a > n$  (the sum of the authoritative prominence scores is greater than the sum of the non-authoritative prominence scores), the following formula is used:

Authoritative media vector:

$$AMV = \frac{(a2-an)}{r2} \quad (\text{Answer lies between } 0 \text{ and } 1.00)$$

If  $a < n$  (the sum of the authoritative prominence scores is less than the sum of the non-authoritative scores), the following formula is used:

Non-authoritative media vector:

$$NMV = \frac{(an-n2)}{r2} \quad (\text{Answer lies between } 0 \text{ and } -1.00)$$

\*Media vector copyright John C. Pollock, 2000–2018

**Table 3** Media vectors

City	Newspaper	Media vector
Boston, MA	Boston Herald	.7639
Madison, WI	Wisconsin State Journal	.6425
Cleveland, OH	The Plain Dealer	.5113
St. Louis, MO	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	.4442
Houston, TX	Houston Chronicle	.3460
Philadelphia, PA	Philadelphia Inquirer	.3023
Detroit, MI	The Detroit News	.2758
New Orleans, LA	The Times Picayune	.2732
Orlando, FL	The Orlando Sentinel	.1538
Salt Lake City, UT	Deseret News	.1292
Denver, CO	Denver Post	.1104
Dallas, TX	The Dallas Morning News	.0942
Chicago, IL	Chicago Sun-Times	.0833
Omaha, NE	The World-Herald	.0712
Pittsburgh, PA	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	.0323
Columbia, SC	The State	.0295
Charlotte, NC	Charlotte Observer	.0170
San Francisco, CA	San Francisco Chronicle	-0.0075
Atlanta, GA	The Atlanta Journal- Constitution	-0.0082
Buffalo, NY	Buffalo News	-0.0250
Minneapolis, MN	Star-Tribune: Newspaper of Two Cities	-0.0330

unexpected due to relatively conservative voting patterns in the Midwest, which often supports less government/authoritative intervention for multiple issues. Nevertheless, previous community structure research has confirmed that region's newspapers' association with progressive reporting on such issues as the "Occupy" movement (Pollock 2013, 1–30), prisoner rights at Guantanamo (Zinck et al. 2014, 2015), immigration reform (Pollock et al. 2014a, 2015a), and government responsibility for posttraumatic stress (Pollock et al. 2014b, 2015b). The Midwest had the highest media vector score, then the Northeast, South, and lastly the West manifesting the lowest media vector.

SPSS was used to calculate Pearson correlations that seek connections between city characteristics and variations in newspaper coverage (Table 5).

**Table 4** Media vectors by region

Region	Media vector
Midwest	.3187
North East	.2684
South	.1352
West	.0774

**Table 5** Pearson correlations

Hypothesis	City Characteristics	Pearson Correlation	Significance
Buffer	Physicians/100,000	0.63	.001**
Vulnerability	Hate Crime	0.516	.010**
Women's Empowerment	% Women in Workforce	0.497	.013*
Belief System	% devotional readers	-0.462	.017*
Belief System	Catholic	0.444	.022*
Belief System	Evangelical	-0.396	.038*
Political Identity	Democratic	0.363	.053*
Political Identity	Republican	-0.358	0.056
Vulnerability	Families/Children 16-18	0.341	0.065
Women's Empowerment	Women College Grads	0.252	0.138
Vulnerability	Unmarried Births	0.223	0.172
Belief System	Protestant	-0.156	0.25
Buffer	College Educated	0.153	0.254
Buffer	Hospital Beds/100,000	0.146	0.263
Buffer	Family Income \$100,000+	0.131	0.286
Vulnerability	Violent Crime	0.113	0.313
Vulnerability	Families/Children 11-15	-0.082	0.362
Buffer	% Municipal Health Care \$	0.078	0.369
Vulnerability	Below Poverty Level	.053	.410
Vulnerability	Unemployed	.046	.422
Vulnerability	Homicide	-0.04	0.431

Different shadings make clear: a) which hypothesis patterns (e.g., buffer, vulnerability, women's empowerment, etc.) display the most "powerful" correlations with variations in "authoritative" coverage (in other words, how close to the top of the table these hypotheses appear); and b) how robustly each hypothesis is confirmed, measured in terms of number of specific city characteristics linked with variations in "authoritative" coverage

### Significant Findings: Public Health, Public Safety, and Women's Empowerment

Robust correlations confirm that demographics reflecting interests in public health, public safety, and women's empowerment are all strongly connected to nationwide coverage emphasizing authoritative responsibility for campus rape and rape culture. Even non-significant correlations all point in the same direction, forming consistent patterns that emphasize a consensus on the importance of authoritative, official responsibility.

#### Buffer Hypothesis: Healthcare Access

*The Greater the Number of Physicians per 100,000 People (Confirmed)*

It was hypothesized that the greater the number of physicians per 100,000 people in a city, the more media supported authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. This hypothesis, which falls under the broad buffer hypothesis was confirmed ( $r = .630, p = .001$ ). Non-significant correlations linking other measures of privilege and healthcare access (percent college educated, family income \$100,000+, hospital beds/100,000, percent municipal spending on

healthcare) are all consistently associated with coverage supporting authoritative responsibility as well.

### **Vulnerability Hypothesis:**

#### *The Higher the Hate Crime Rate (Confirmed)*

It was hypothesized that the higher the hate crime rate in a city, the more media supported authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. This hypothesis, which falls under the broad vulnerability hypothesis, was confirmed ( $r = .516$ ,  $p = .010$ ). Almost all other measures of vulnerability explored in this study, encompassing non-significant correlations, are also associated with media support for authoritative, formal responsibility for campus rape and rape culture, including other measures of crime and immiseration (violent crime, unmarried births, below poverty level, unemployed) and family position in life cycle (families with children at risk, ages 16–18).

### **Stakeholder Hypothesis: Women's Empowerment**

#### *The Higher the Percentages of Females in the Workforce (Confirmed)*

It was hypothesized that the higher the percentages of females in the workforce in a city, the more authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. This hypothesis, which falls under the broad stakeholder hypothesis, was confirmed ( $r = .497$ ,  $p = .013$ ). A non-significant measure of women's empowerment, percent women college graduates in a city, was also consistently associated with more media emphasis on authoritative, official responsibility for rape and rape culture.

### **Belief System: Supportive Coverage Among Catholics, Oppositional Coverage Among Devotional Readers and Evangelicals**

As expected, the greater the percentage of Catholics in a city, the more media emphasized authoritative responsibility for campus rape and rape culture ( $r = .444$ ,  $p = .022$ ). By contrast, and as expected, the higher the percentage of devotional readers ( $r = -.462$ ,  $p = .017$ ) or Evangelicals ( $r = -.396$ ,  $p = .038$ ), the less media emphasis on authoritative responsibility. These results are strongly consistent with previous community structure studies on links between belief system categories and coverage of critical issues.

### **Political Identity**

As expected, the higher the percentage voting Democratic in the previous presidential election (2012), the more media support for authoritative responsibility for campus rape and rape culture ( $r = .363$ ,  $p = .053$ ). Conversely, and predicted, higher percentages voting Republican were linked to less media support for authoritative, formal responsibility ( $r = -.358$ ,  $p = .056$ ). Both findings robustly confirm prior research.

## Regression Analysis: Campus Rape Culture a “Public Health” and “Public Safety” Issue, Not Simply a “Women’s Rights Issue”

As defined through the Pearson Correlations, a regression analysis confirmed the independent role of three specific variables. Number of physicians per 100,000 was the most significant variable (40.5% of the variance). The other two significant variables were percent of women employed (10.4%), and percent of hate crime (7.2%), for a combined total of 58.1% of the variance. All variables were positively correlated with authoritative responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses. The full regression analysis can be found in Table 6.

## Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

This study illuminated how different frames of articles on rape and rape culture on college campuses between 2003 and 2016 varied according to nationwide differences in community characteristics. After conducting Pearson Correlations and regression analysis, evidence of buffer, stakeholder, and vulnerability patterns was found.

Pearson correlations for physicians, hate crime, and, women’s employment were the most significant, suggesting that the issue of rape and rape culture on college campuses reaches beyond an indicator of “women’s empowerment” or “women’s rights” issues (percent women in the workforce) to mirror strongly indicators of “public health” (physicians/100,000) and “public safety” (level of hate crime, an indicator of “vulnerability”), all connected powerfully to coverage emphasizing authoritative responsibility. Almost all other measures of community privilege/healthcare access, vulnerability and women’s empowerment in the study were similarly associated with media support for official, authoritative responsibility for campus rape and rape culture. In addition, the Midwest provided more authoritative responsibility coverage of rape and rape culture on college campuses than expected (media vector = .3187), and the West provided the least authoritative coverage of rape on college campuses, less than expected (media vector = .0774). These results were surprising, because the Midwest is a notoriously socially conservative section of the nation, and much of the West is notoriously socially liberal. The issue of campus rape and rape culture may not fit neatly into a traditional conservative-liberal continuum.

**Table 6** Regression analysis

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> cumulative	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> change	F change	Sig. F change
1. Physicians	.636	.405	.405	11.563	.003
2. Physicians, Woman Employment	.713	.509	.104	3.387	.084
3. Physicians, Woman Employment, Hate Crime	.762	.581	.072	2.584	.129

This study extends and confirms the findings of previous studies. It foregrounds patterns about health care, importance of women, and hate crime connected to coverage emphasizing authoritative, official responsibility for rape and rape culture on college campuses, suggesting a capacity to mobilize public opinion or public policy initiatives related to campus rape culture around broad issues of public health and public safety, to which specific women's health and safety issues appear closely linked. Empirically, coverage of rape and rape culture on college campuses appears to resonate in media not simply as a "women's" cultural issue, but more profoundly, as civic "public health" and "hate crime" issues, broadening the rape concept from a previously narrow focus only on the concerns of women on college campuses. Media illumination of community-level interests reveals a professional willingness of journalists to act "responsibly" on a human rights issue, mirroring local concerns. Methodologically, combining measures of both "prominence" and "direction" affords highly sensitive media scores or "Media Vectors" that illuminate the capacity of media to reflect community-level indicators of "health access," "vulnerability" and "women's empowerment." Theoretically, by emphasizing the influence of local demographics, community structure theory complements predictions of national-level agenda-setting theory, which focus on the power of prominent newspapers to set agendas at the local level. The comparative importance of community structure characteristics was recently recognized in an empirical study by one of the founders of agenda-setting perspectives (Funk and McCombs 2017). Community and local concerns of vulnerable groups can clearly make a vibrant difference for journalists.

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