

Victim Blaming, Protests, and Public Space: News Coverage of the Occupy Wall Street Sexual Assaults

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Abstract

Occupy Wall Street was a national protest centered on wealth redistribution and sparked a national dialogue about economic reform. The movement faced internal challenges of crime occurring in the camps including sexual assault; these crimes were covered by news outlets as part of their Occupy Wall Street coverage. This article will expand upon previous feminist research on sexual violence news coverage by using a feminist media analysis to examine the coverage of sexual assaults occurring during Occupy Wall Street. Previous feminist research on sexual assault coverage argues that newspapers use myths about rape to discredit the crime and blame the victim. I argue that the coverage of sexual assaults during Occupy Wall Street used a “blame the victim” narrative to link the participation of women protesting in public space to gender based violence. I will explore how the actions of activists, the physical space of Occupy camps and the lack of crime prevention of the protesters and police were used by reporters to shift the blame from the perpetrator onto the victim. News coverage is considered an objective source of information so biased narratives of sexual assaults can reinforce society's traditional ideology about sexual assault, which can affect the needs of survivors.

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Introduction

Occupy Wall Street captured the world's attention in the fall of 2011, as hundreds of protesters camped out in Zuccotti Park with their battle cry of "We are the 99 percent!" Gitlin (2012) argues that the original goal of the social movement was to bring awareness to economic inequality in which 99 percent of the wealth in the United States is controlled by one percent of the population. The name Occupy Wall Street signified the physical occupation of Zuccotti Park, a space outside of Wall Street (a prime financial center of New York City) by protestors who set up tents and refused to leave the location.

Zuccotti Park itself is relatively small, about three quarters of an acre in size, surrounded by high-rise buildings, and is two blocks from Wall Street. It is mostly paved, with some greenery, granite benches and tables, and open space (Hammond, 2013). As Occupy Wall Street activists gained in numbers, the park transformed from an open space to a city within the city. Hammond (2013) described the layout of the encampment as such:

The park slopes gently downward from east to west; the top (eastern) end was the site of the general assemblies and the permanent organizational apparatus (though part of it was also off site); in the middle, practical activities: tents for sleeping; a medical post; the "kitchen" which collected and distributed donated food (cooking was forbidden because it was deemed a fire hazard). The bottom (west) was occupied by a drumming circle, at first going day and night but later restricted in hours to accommodate the complaints of neighbors. (p. 510)

The layout of the park helped to not only support the goals of Occupy Wall Street movement but provide a space where activists could camp out indefinitely.

Thousands of protesters packed into the park with their tents and supplies, creating an overcrowded living space. Within these cramped encampments, Occupy Wall Street had problems with sanitation and creating a clean environment for protesters. One of the major problems with the space was the lack of bathroom access and running water within Zuccotti

Park. This led protesters to use facilities at nearby businesses and restaurants (Grossman, and Pervaiz, 2011). Often the camp was described by the press with ominous phrases including “sanitation hazard” and “intolerable health and safety concerns.” This kind of language was used by the press to explain how bad these spaces were (Taranto, 2011, B4). However, even with the crowded and dirty conditions, protesters flocked to the movement to lend their support.

As the protest gained in numbers so did the news coverage of the movement. The amount of news on Occupy Wall Street varied from newspaper to newspaper, but DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun (2012) argue framing of coverage was generally negative by describing the movement as disorganized and violent. Once the press was aware that violence in the camps was occurring, including sexual assaults, this violence became a focal point of news coverage. Often, these assaults were presented as a daily threat within the camp with quotes like: “Zuccotti Park has become so overrun by sexual predators attacking women in the night that organizers felt compelled to set up a female-only sleeping tent to keep the sickos away” (Taranto, 2011, p.B4). In addition, there is a lack of official data from Occupy Wall Street on how many sexual assaults occurred within the camps; this is partly due to the scattered and non-hierarchical organization of Occupy, as well as the fact that many women decided to deal with the perpetrators on their own rather than reporting to the police (Grossman & Firger, 2011; Schapiro, Einhorn, & Kennedy, 2011; Buckley & Flegehheimer, 2011.) However, the actual numbers of assaults are not necessary for this research because the news media from *The New York Daily News*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* made this issue into a pressing concern and presented it as a crisis. Also, while there is no official data to indicate the gender identity of victims at Occupy Wall Street, the press only discussed female victims and this paper examines those victims.

This trend of news coverage of sexual assault in the camps often featured a blame the victim narrative, in which women were blamed for their sexual assault because they participated in Occupy Wall Street. Out of the 24 articles examined for this project that discussed sexual

assault or rape at Occupy Wall Street, I identified 10 articles as using a blame the victim narrative. This rash of victim blaming coverage mainly took place in November, the third month of the protests, when the framing on newspapers shifted from the eclectic nature of Occupy Wall Street to violence occurring in the camps (DeLuca et al., 2012). From November 2nd, 2011 to November 8th, 2011, seven articles used a blame the victim narrative to describe two sexual assault cases. The first sexual assault case was reported on November 2nd by *The New York Daily News*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, where Tony Iketubosin, an Occupy protestor who worked in the kitchen, was charged with sexually assaulting two women on two separate occasions. Also in November, was the second case of Lauren DiGioia, who was sexually assaulted her first night in the camp, and reported her assault to the police. This case was reported by *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Daily News*.

Members of the sexual assault survivor's team within Occupy Wall Street recognized the harm being done by the news media with their sexual assault coverage. On November 4th, 2011 they released the statement, "Transforming Harm & Building Safety: Confronting Sexual Violence of Occupy Wall Street & Beyond" on the Occupy Wall Street website, to address their concerns. While the team did not mention any particular newspaper article or names in their statement, the text mentions an event that mirrors Lauren DiGioia's assault. The sexual assault survivor's team argued that this coverage not only hurts survivors of violence for blaming them for their assault, but also was used to discredit Occupy Wall Street.

OccupyWallstreet.org (2012) stated:

We have been saddened and angered to observe some members of the media and the public blame the survivor for the assault. A survivor is never at fault. It is unacceptable to criticize a survivor for the course of action they chose to take or their community for supporting them in that choice. Additionally, we were troubled at the time of her report that responding police officers appeared to be more concerned by her political involvement in OWS than her need for support after a traumatic incident of sexual

violence. A survivor is not at fault for being assaulted while peacefully participating in a public protest to express their political opinions. (para. 5)

This shows that Occupy Wall Street was aware of problematic representation of sexual assault victims by news media and how the victims were used to vilify the Occupy Wall Street movement.

This statement by Occupy Wall Street in relationship to the news coverages of sexual assault in the Occupy camps led me to several research questions. How did the newspapers blame the victims of sexual assaults in the camp? Were the victims blamed by the press for being in a place that the press vilified? Did the occupation of public space by the victims factor in to how the news reporters covered the cases of sexual assault?

From my data analysis of news coverage of sexual assaults that occurred during Occupy Wall Street, I argue that several themes can be found in the narratives created by the news reporters covering the sexual assaults. These themes helped to construct a story that blamed the victim by inferring that the victim could have prevented her assault by changing her behavior. Usually narratives of victim blaming includes analyzing women's clothing, their sexual history or behavior at the time of the assault as a way of finding the victim at fault for the crime. However, in the articles examined for this paper, the analyzation is not of the women themselves but of Occupy Wall Street. I call this category of narratives "indirect blame the victim," in which the coverage infers that the assaults could have been avoided if women simply didn't participate in Occupy Wall Street. The blaming of the victim is rarely directly stated by news reporters, but implied through the weaving of two themes. These themes shape the indirect victim blaming narrative and link the participation of women protesting in public space to sexual violence. The first theme is the media representations of Occupy Wall Street as unsafe territory for women because of the perceived seediness occurring in the camps. The second theme is the belief that Occupy Wall Street was created and run by deviant and dangerous men and women should have expected violent behavior from their fellow activists.

Unlike the “wrong place at the wrong time,” in which sexual assault is seen as not the victim’s fault, but simply a chance occurrence where the rape was outside the woman’s control, the Occupy Wall Street victims were not seen as unlucky but as active participants in their assault. This blame is attributed to the dangerous nature of Occupy and the lack of crime prevention in the camp. The newspapers presented the narrative that women were willingly putting themselves in harm’s way by engaging in Occupy Wall Street rather than behaving as innocent victims.

This research helps to fill a gap in the current sexual assault and social justice research by analyzing the connections between narratives of sexual assaults and protests that feature an occupation of public spaces. Research on sexual assault news coverage (See Benedict, 1992; Carter, 2002; and Cuklanz, 1996 for more information) usually focuses on the narratives of particular cases of sexual assault. At the same time researchers (See Bendord & Snow, 2000; and Ferree, 2003 for more information) have examined the various framings of social movements by news reports and how these narratives can influence perceptions of social issues of news consumers. By exploring the connections between occupations of public space and sexual assault coverage, this analysis examines how these two areas can become intertwined and influence how women in particular can be blamed for their assault for simply being a protester.

Literature Review

In order to understand how news coverage of the Occupy Wall Street sexual assaults reinforced a “blame the victim” narrative, it is important to recognize the role of rape culture in the construction of these myths and how they are utilized in news coverage. This section first reviews feminist literature on rape culture, and how “blame the victim” myths are used in rape culture and influence women’s perceptions of public space. Then I will explore how media utilizes and constructs blame the victim myths in news coverage of sexual assault.

Definitions of Rape and Sexual Assault

While sexual assault and rape are different crimes committed, both are an active part of rape culture. Legal definitions of sexual assault and rape vary from state to state and can limit who can or cannot be a victim depending on the type of violence that occurred. I will be using Humphries' (2009) definition of rape, which is "forced sexual intercourse with physical or psychological coercion" (p.4). This definition would include vaginal, oral or anal sexual intercourse, as well as penetration or digital penetration. Humphries also argues that sexual assault is different from rape and includes a wide range of victimizations of unwanted sexual conduct. Sexual assault is defined by Shaw and Lee (2009) as "sexual conduct without consent and/or involves the use of force. Like rape, sexual assault is an act of power and control" (p. 511). Within coverage of Occupy Wall Street the words rape and sexual assault are used to describe the violence against the victim, and sometimes seem to be used interchangeably. Due to the lack of details presented in newspapers of the physical act of the attack, it is unclear whether a sexual assault or rape occurred. For the purpose of this paper, I will utilize the word choice provided by the newspaper I am examining. Regardless of whether sexual assault or rape occurs, victims of both can experience the influence of rape myths and be blamed for the violence.

Rape Culture

Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth (2005) explain that, "Rape culture is a complex set of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women" (p. xi). In this way, violence against women is seen as the norm, rather than a problem. Bevacqua's (2000) analysis of rape culture broadens the definition of rape culture to include male privilege: "Sexual assault is tolerated, violent and sexual images are intertwined, women are blamed for being raped, sexist attitudes prevail, and male sexual privilege goes unquestioned" (p. 9). However, it is important to note that while this paper's focus is on female victims, the same rape culture supports, condones, and perpetrates myths about sexual violence against male and transgender victims (see Davies, 2002). Despite the gender of the victim, rape culture is more

than the act of rape itself; it is the historical, cultural, and institutional ideologies that both support and condone the occurrence of rape. A key idea of rape culture is that violence is normalized and women are taught to be in constant fear of rape. This is linked to the idea of sexual terrorism, a system by which males frighten, and by frightening, dominate and control women (Sheffield, 1987, p. 171). Sexual terrorism provides support and legitimization for those who act out their contempt for women as well as limits the behavior of women to keep them in their place.

Blame the Victim Rape Myths

Rape myths do not appear out of nowhere, but are a function of rape culture. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) define rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held and that serve to deny and justify male aggression against women” (p. 134). Some examples of rape myths include: women being asked to be raped by how they dress or act, women can expect rape to happen in public, and women should avoid drinking to stop rape from happening. In fact, rape myths justify violence against women by focusing less on the violence men commit in sexual assault, and putting more pressure on women to prevent violence. Also, empirical evidence shows that adhering to the behaviors set by these rape myths do not guarantee women will be protected from rape. Instead, Edwards, Dardis, Gidycz, Turchik, & Reynolds (2011) argue that rape myths are perpetuated in institutions including religion, legal systems, and media to continually reinforce and uphold unequal power relationships. Rape myths are not created out of thin air, but are constructed to make the crime of rape less of a societal problem and more of an individual problem.

Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) highlight three categories of rape myths: excusal, denial of rape’s existence, and denial of rape’s seriousness. I will focus on excusal myths as this is central to my argument on how blaming the victim is linked to consequences of women occupying public space, such as women shouldn’t share tents with strangers. In excusal myths, or more commonly known as “blame the victim myths,” blame of the man is reduced because

the female victim's actions led him on. Edwards et al. (2011) argue that excusal myths center on historical ideas of women's respectability and expectations about womanhood. This means portrayals of victimhood must match up with gender roles, including traits of passivity and submissiveness. Ryan (2011) argues that these blame the victim myths police women's bodies and behaviors to keep women in their place within a male dominated society.

Blame the victim myths encourage women to behave in a certain way to avoid violence. This not only has serious implications for survivors of violence, but also for the daily lives of women. Even though many scholars argue that women are much more likely to face violence inside the home than in public, Cordon (2007) states women change their behavior to protect themselves from the fear of rape in public (p. 102-103). Stanko (1988) argues women are much more likely than men to develop avoidance or self-exclusion strategies, even though men are more likely to experience violence in the public sphere. These tactics such as avoiding certain streets or accessing public space during certain times, Valentine (1989) argues, give women a restricted use and occupation of public space. Using blame the victim myths reinforces traditional femininity and limits women's participation in public space. Within the coverage of the Occupy Wall Street sexual assaults, the news coverage utilized these rape myths about women's behavior in public space to blame women for entering a space that was considered unsafe and dangerous.

News Coverage and Rape Myths

Burt (1980) and Grubb and Turner (2012) argue that how we perceive rape, and who should be at fault differs among population groups and is linked to other attitudes in our culture such as gender role stereotypes and ideas about intrapersonal violence. One way our society constructs and reinforces these ideas in our culture is through the media. For example, Kahlor and Eastin (2011) found that the genre of television programs and the amount of television watched can influence audience's beliefs about false accusations and if the rape was the victim's fault. However, it is important to look beyond the number of people who support rape

myths. Edwards et al. (2011) state that even if a majority doesn't believe a rape myth, if an individual with authority or power believes a myth, it can have long lasting consequences through policy, media, law, or religion.

As they relate to news coverage of sexual assault cases, rape myths are given validity by presenting the cases as objective and unbiased. In a study looking at the effects of rape myths in print journalism, Franuik et al. (2008) found that not only were rape myths heavily used within coverage of the Kobe Bryant rape case, but after reading news reports featuring a victim blaming myth, participants were more likely to side with the assailant rather than the victim. Unlike fictional accounts of sexual assault that occur in movies or television shows, news coverage of these events are seen as credible and reliable information. News coverage values objectivity, which means that audiences may look at rape coverage as unbiased representations of reality. Literature from feminists such as Benedict (1992), Carter (1998), and Meyers (1997) argues that the structure of how journalists construct news produces an environment that allows for a slanted representation of rape. Rape is considered part of crime news, but fails to exclusively follow the construction of crime as deviance, or the idea that criminals are deviants acting outside the limits of acceptable social behavior

Meyers (1997) states:

Although the crime as deviance theory claims that the news defines and ostracizes the criminal as deviant, studies of news coverage of violence against women indicate the news positioning of the female victim as deviant and deserving of condemnation if she appears to have disregarded or flaunted gender role expectations. (p. 24)

This shows a link to rape culture in which the man is not considered a deviant for his behavior, but rather the woman must be blamed for her actions. Benedict (1992) argues that female victims of sexual assault are marked as a victim in relationship to eight factors, including deviation from the traditional female sex role, whether she knows the assailant, and her physical features. While these factors are not deviant behaviors on their own, they become deviant when

a sexual assault occurs and hurts the women's credibility in arguing that a sexual assault occurred.

One way credibility of the victim is distorted is by the use of sources that can either reduce or build credibility. Benedict (1992) argues that journalists use these sources to hide behind their biased reporting by blaming rape myth usage on sources rather than their reporting. "Facts" and sources can be used to discredit the victim by finding past information or gaps in her story to discredit her that may not even be relevant to the case. In addition, because news is seen as objective, reporters seek out sources that represent objective viewpoints. Meyers (1997) argues these official experts include police officers and lawyers, who have a stake in the sexual assault cases. Because men are seen as more credible, Carter (1998) argues men are more frequently used as sources than women. This means that not only are news stories shaped by men, but violence against women is seen and told through men's eyes. In relationship to the Occupy Wall Street coverage, this meant that not only were men more frequently reporting on the violence at the camps, but women protesters and sexual assault victims were not interviewed as frequently as men. Female protesters were unable to tell their side of the story of Occupy, meaning news coverage often saw these women as casualties of the Occupy movement.

While sources are used to shape the character of the victim, the language of the news can also be used to blame the victim. Benedict (1992) argues that women in the news are described in ways that men are not, including adjectives about physical attractiveness, their relationship to men and linking behavior to sexuality. These words are not only "consistently sexual, condescending or infantilizing," but can blame the victim (p. 20). News coverage can also blame the victim by statements that question why a crime occurs. Meyers (1997) states, "These myths or assumptions are embedded in the journalistic 'why' of a story and ask why was a woman raped, beaten or murdered - was it something she said or did?" (p. 63). The sentiment is that the victim's choices could have stopped the crime from occurring.

Finally, language can make the crime seem less harsh than it really is. Meyers (1997) argues that men's behavior or actions are masked through obscure language such as "fondling" rather than "assaulting" to excuse the assailant and discredit women. Feminists have also critiqued the use of passive voice when discussing sexual assault cases. In the "Grammar of Male Violence," Jennie Ruby argues that passive voices allows women to be seen as the victims and ignores the role the perpetrator played in the crime (p. 26). For example, newspapers will state "a woman was raped" rather than "a man raped a woman." This language allows for the conversation about rape prevention to focus on women, leaving the perpetrators with little accountability. Meyers (1997) takes this argument a step further and argues that obscuring men's behavior or actions removes the context of power and control that is central to issues of violence against women. In all of these cases, language is used to diminish the crime through word choice where sexual assault is not always seen as a crime of violence against women but as something a women could have avoided by changing her behavior. Within Occupy Wall Street, because details about the crime are not given, the word choice of "sexual assault," "rape," or "grope," presented by the reporters is the only source of information we have about the crime. This means that the actual crime is obscured through language that does not accurately describe the attack or the violence occurring within the camps.

It is important to remember that not only do victim blaming narratives from the press hurt the individual women they report on, but these narratives also impact the society we live in. Newspapers serve a crucial role in teaching women about the potential dangers of sexual violence; however, Carter (1998) argues this education is presented through rape myths and extraordinary cases that harm women more than help women. Gordon and Riger (1989) argue that news coverage of rape "enhances women's fears and leaves misleading impressions of both the crime and how it could be dealt with" (p. 132). One way this education takes place is by using women as a cautionary tale of what could happen. Meyers (1997) argues that news reports act as a warning and a form of social control that outline the boundaries of acceptable

behavior and what the consequences are for disobeying them. This is part of Valentine's (1989) argument that women who do not uphold social norms and are raped are used as a warning for other women. Newspapers can serve as an unintentional form of propaganda for sexual terrorism where women are taught that certain behaviors and actions warrant sexual assault. The coverage of Occupy Wall Street, used these victims of sexual assaults to not only blame women for participating in Occupy Wall Street, but also to diminish the credibility of the movement. At the same time the victims were used as examples of why women should not participate in Occupy Wall Street and presented Occupy Wall Street as an unsafe environment.

This literature review shows that rape culture is pervasive in our society and delegitimizes the experiences of women by stating it was their fault that violence occurred. These blame the victim myths are intertwined with beliefs about gender roles and sexuality and are perpetuated by various institutions, including the media. Within the media, sexual assault news coverage creates a skewed picture of violence by using biased sources and language that minimizes the crime. This type of reporting can influence perception of sexual assault and influences women's perceptions of safety in public spaces. The goal of this research is to show how blame the victim myths are linked to concepts of public space to create an indirect form of blaming the victim. This indirect blaming, while still part the excusal myths, represents a new way of looking at blaming the victim in which case details are not needed to cast judgment on the victim.

Methodology

This project uses a feminist media framework, in which researchers attempt to study culture using a feminist analysis of media to discover cultural meanings and uncover the political, social, and economic implications of those meanings (Hesse-Biber, 2014). To find these cultural meanings, I use a frame analysis method in which researchers identify central themes on particular topic within the data to show the various interpretations of an event (Goffman, 1974).

I explore the discourse of news coverage, and how it relates to current ideology about public space and victims of sexual assault. A discourse, Hesse-Biber (2014) argues, functions as a system of meanings created by a combination of texts and the social practices that inform them (p. 265). By analyzing texts, researchers can question meanings that otherwise go unexamined. For this project, my texts are mainstream newspaper articles that covered the sexual assaults in the New York camp. These articles allow me to investigate the framing of the sexual assaults and how they shaped the discourse surrounding women's participation in public space.

My analysis draws upon prior feminist research on news coverage of sexual assault, especially the work of Helen Benedict's (1992) book, *Virgin and Vamp*. This book laid the groundwork for feminist research on news of coverage of rape and provided several areas to explore for themes in the coverage such as the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, and the events before the rape. I also use feminist theories of sexual terrorism and rape culture to explain how news coverage connects victim blaming with limiting women's participation in protests. Sheffield (1987) linked sexual terrorism to print media by calling media a form of propaganda to fuel sexual terrorism. However, little research has been conducted relating sexual terrorism to activism. This paper helps fill the gaps and make connections between these areas of research.

I collected my data through the Lexis-Nexis database, using the keywords "Occupy Wall Street" and limited those results through the keywords "sexual assault" and/or "rape." From the articles with my keywords, I narrowed the results to include only articles from mainstream papers, defined as newspapers with a daily circulation of over 500,000. The sample includes papers such as *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

I used an iterative process of data collection in which I started the analysis of these texts. With an iterative process, Hesse-Biber (2014) argues themes emerge cyclically after reading the texts for patterns. In this way, the texts guide the researcher in what is important to

examine. However, based on prior research from Meyers (1997), and Benedict (1992), I hypothesized that quotes from sources, language choice, and the general atmosphere of Occupy would be used to blame the victim.

My analysis comes from a feminist framework in that it not only focuses on women's lives and experiences, but commits to finding solutions to challenge hegemonic ideologies presented in the press. Feminist research should not be done for the sake of research, but to better the lives of women. My paper is not just exploring what this victim blaming towards the Occupy women looks like, but finding solutions to help journalists create coverage that supports rather than holds the victim responsible. Likewise, my project stems from a feminist epistemology in which knowledge is understood to never be completely value free and objective. Instead, researchers have situated knowledge in which "concepts of knowledge and truth are always partial and inseparable from the lived experiences of the researched" (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p.5). This means as an academic, I cannot separate my experiences so they do not influence my own work. Due to this "situated knowledge," it is important to point out my own biases and recognize them in this project.

Going into the project, I understood that my own biases would shape my work. I struggled with my own opinions of Occupy Wall Street and how they would influence my research. I was a supporter of the movement and took part in my local Occupy movement. However, I became disheartened and concerned when I heard about the increasing violence against women protestors occurring in the camp and other problems within the "leadership" of the movement where women of color's voices were silenced. I believe that Occupy sparked a conversation on economic inequality, but members of the movement were not as revolutionary as they claimed to be.

Also, as a woman, I understand that this research will be influenced by my experiences. I have not been immune to the fear that the danger lurks out in dark alleyways, or in the bushes. While the literature review and my own experiences show that sexual assault is much more

likely to happen in the home than on the street, I still struggle with fear when out at night in certain areas. While I have not participated in any movement as large as Occupy Wall Street in New York City, I do wonder if I would feel safe there, after seeing the coverage of the movement. I pondered whether my knowledge of sexual assault and crime would be enough to allow me to feel safe camping in a public space with strangers, while knowing the police might not help me if something happened. These experiences are not limitations, but the fuel that drove me to investigate the coverage of Occupy Wall Street.

Discussion

My original assumption was that Occupy Wall Street would have easily identifiable examples of victim blaming, which is typical of sexual assault case coverage. I expected source quotes would be used to discredit the victim, the relationship between the victim and the aggressor to be scrutinized, and details would be used to paint an unflattering view of the victim. After my analysis, I found a more complex understanding of how sexual assault coverage functions within social movements. This narrative shaped a discourse that suggested women would be assaulted if they participated in Occupy Wall Street, not because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, but by associating with people seen as dangerous in a public space. This discourse was shaped through two types of coverage of sexual assault occurring during Occupy Wall Street, that I call direct and indirect coverage. Direct coverage on sexual assault focused on providing an overview of the case, details of what happened, and who was involved. This form of coverage is typical in news reports of sexual assault and often features rape myths and victim blaming.

Indirect coverage did not focus on the individual sexual assault cases themselves, but how sexual assault fit into the larger context of violence at Occupy Wall Street. These articles mentioned sexual assaults happening within the camps, but did not provide details of the crime. No details or context are given to the sexual assaults, rather, violence against women is linked to other forms of violence happening during the occupation of Zuccotti Park. This type of news

coverage focused more on the violent nature of Occupy Wall Street itself rather than the details of sexual assault in the camp. Indirect coverage does not directly blame the victim because no individual details are provided about her rape or her as a person. Instead, this type of coverage uses the behavior of Occupy as a stand-in for her own behavior, in which the ideas about public space are utilized to blame her. Patterns emerge that show instead of seeing the sexual assaults as “Wrong place and time” in which the rape victim is innocent of the crime, the dangerous atmosphere of Occupy presented in news coverage is used as a place where she should not have entered for her own safety.

After coding the news articles, I created two themes that emerged from the data set, which I have entitled: “No Place for Women,” and “Guilty by Association.” These themes were developed based on previous sexual assault reporting research by Benedict (1992) and Gardner’s (1995) research on men and women’s beliefs about how women should interact and behave in public space. These themes use metaphors, source quotes, and imagery to display the public space at Zuccotti Park as unsafe for women. Linked with these patterns are rape myths about how women should interact and behave in public space to be safe. The newspapers stories blamed the women of Occupy for failing to follow these myths, and are thus seen as deserving of their assaults. These two themes I have entitled: “No Place for Women,” and “Guilty by Association.” The theme “No Place for Women” looks at the physical description of the Occupy camps and how the language used to describe the camp was visually linked to places women should not enter and how tents were marked as unsafe public spaces. The theme “Guilty by Association” centers on the presentation of the protesters as dangerous individuals whose violence extends to violence against women and propels the myth that only certain men are capable of sexual assault. At the same time women in the Occupy Camps could not turn to the police or their fellow protesters for protection against these men capable of sexual assault.

No Place for Women: The Physical Space of Occupy

Despite the fact that Zuccotti Park is actually on the wealthier side of New York City, the newspapers created an image of a dirty, lawless, crime-ridden area (Crovitz, 2011; Grossman & Firger, 2011; Saslow & Lynch, 2011; Taranto; 2011b). This presentation not only made it seem as though violence was bound to happen at Occupy, but that the physical public space was unsafe territory for women. This theme examines language and imagery that linked the camp in Zuccotti Park to a dangerous, seedy part of town by focusing on the physical set up of the camp, and discussions of the tents themselves as public space. This centers on the idea that there are places that unfit for women to venture into because these areas are seen as more prone to violence.

One of the central aspects of the Occupy Wall Street movement was the literal occupation of Zuccotti Park. However, the park as an outdoor area was not meant to accommodate the protestors as living quarters, so as the movement grew there was a constant need for more space in a restricted amount of land. While Grossman and Pervaiz (2011) stated that while there were “agreed upon paths through the park,” they were becoming increasingly crowded. The same report mentions that “nearly every patch of cold, hard ground in the park is a sleeping space, work space, kitchen or library” (p. A21). This packed area of tents made it harder to police the camp, as it was impossible to see every nook and cranny within. As a *New York Times* article by Grossman and Figer (2011) stated, “The emergence of a criminal element has become a thorny challenge for Occupy Wall Street as it has transformed from an open-air encampment with little privacy to a tent city” (p. A21). As Occupy became larger, the sense of privacy decreased creating more violence in the park. Buckley and Flegenheimer (2011) described it as, “tents have popped up transforming the open park into a beehive of private hidden spaces” (p. A24). With more and more protestors flocking to Occupy Wall Street with their tents and tarps, media coverage focused on the various sub-groups in the movement staking out their place in public space with limited room. Often they described the tensions

between these groups using euphemisms that likened the friction to gang violence: “The congestion has led protest factions to stake out their own neighborhoods and cut their own deals” (Grossman & Pervaiz, 2011, p. A21). Each sub-group of Occupy had their own area within the camp, creating subsections of the park. Buckley and Flegenheimer (2011) report from *The New York Times* stated that the park had divided into neighborhoods, with the western edge along Church Street as “the wrong side of the tracks” (p. A24). These crowded living spaces meant that women constantly had to monitor their surroundings in the park, on high alert for danger in the park which was presented as rampant. For example *The Washington Post* reported, “Recent news updates from Occupy protests read like a crime blotter” (Saslow & Lynch, 2011, p. A1). A *New York Times* article stated, “Just because this is a protest in a park doesn't mean you're immune to crime. People need to act as if it is any other day in their lives” (Buckley & Flegenheimer, 2011, p. A24). For women this means being on constant alert for trouble as they would in other public spaces. As one officer noted in response to the sexual assaults in the park, “They [Women] are in the lion's den, so it's not surprising that they are more susceptible to crimes,” (Grossman & Firger, 2011, p. A21). This quote makes the connection that Occupy is an unsafe location and that women are putting themselves in danger by entering the space.

Not only did the increase of tents create issues of safety outside, but the growing number of protesters meant tents were no longer seen as private spaces where women could possibly be safe from strangers. While tents are usually considered a way to have privacy in a public space, the tents were beginning to become public spaces rather than individual dwellings. In November of 2011, there were over 200 tents within Zuccotti Park and they had anywhere from one to 30 people within a tent (Grossman & Shallwani, 2011). The growth of Occupy meant that more room was needed for the increase in protestors. Smaller tents made way for larger, more military style tents, complete with bunk beds that could fit larger groups of people. Often this meant that strangers were rooming together, or with friends made within the

movement.

Women in particular might be wary of rooming with strangers because they are socialized to be suspicious of unknown individuals. When women are in public, encountering any stranger is potentially unpredictable and uncontrollable, which means women's interaction and communication with others profoundly affects their sense of security in public (Valentine, 1989). Willingly rooming with these individuals is a form of putting themselves in harm's way. The news heightened this fear by focusing on the assaults that occurred within these tents, citing that these were no longer private spaces for women (Buckley & Flegenheimer, 2011).

One example of this was several reports of a protester, Tony Iketubosin, sexually assaulting two women within the tents. The first sexual assault happened when he and the victim shared a tent after the victim had an argument with an individual she originally has shared a tent with. Newspapers alluded to the foolishness of the victims for sharing a tent with a stranger in the first place. Grossman and Firger (2011) mentioned that after a fight with a friend, the victim "met Iketubosin. He offered to let her stay in his tent. The alleged victim took Iketubosin up on his offer" (p. A21). This quote points out that Iketubosin is a stranger to this woman, and yet she still decides to sleep in his tent. She went to bed in Iketubosin's tent and woke up to him removing her pants and then raping her. This framing allows the blame to be placed on the woman for sharing a private quarters with a strange man (or several men).

The second sexual assault committed by Iketubosin occurred after he helped the victim set up her tent and she found him in her tent the next day and refused to leave. He then assaulted her until she pushed him away (Grossman & Gardiner, 2011). Iketubosin preyed on the women via the tents, but he was not the only one. Another protester, Laura DiGioia, also had an unnamed man in her tent who "groped" her and attempted to rape her (Schapiro, Einhorn, & Kennedy, 2011, p.5). In all of these cases, the tents were the site of the sexual assault and occurred when the tent became a public place rather than a private space. Both in and out of the tents, women had no place in Occupy where they could feel safe. The press

presented the women's place of sleep and privacy as filled with strange individuals who could harm them. This is important because women are taught that strangers are the thing to fear, and sleeping within the same vicinity of these strangers puts them at risk for danger.

Occupy attempted to fix the dangers of sexual assault through the construction of women's only tents, which acted as a safe house for women from sexual assault. The tent was described as a 16 square foot military grade tent frame that could shelter 30 women and was constantly guarded by women (Schaprio, Willis, & Karoliszin, 2011). One female protester stated, "It [the women's only tent] will be used to protect ourselves from people out there. I'm sick and tired of women getting taken advantage of, raped and murdered" (Schaprio, Willis, & Karoliszn, 2011, p.5). Another female protester stated that she would be sleeping in the safe space "partially because of the recent attacks that have been happening." She adds, "I think that this will help bring more women to the movement as well. I think a lot of women have been hesitant and especially for those that are new and don't know a lot of people it's hard to find a safe place to stay" (Grossman & Shallwani, 2011, p.A21). This quote is telling in that it shows that women are not only aware of the sexual assaults occurring the camps, but the fear of violence was keeping women away from the Occupy Wall Street camps.

The need for a women's only tent was seen by news coverage from *The New York Daily News*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, as evidence of a problem of sexual assault within Occupy and a poor way of handling sexual assault. The coverage of the tent was described with scare quotes around the tent such as "safe tent" or "safe house." Scare quotes are often used to create sarcasm, or denote disbelief. While possibly used to denote the purpose of the tent, scare quotes also created the feeling that the tent gave the illusion of being safe without actually being safe. One example described the setup of the tent as "to increase the *sense of safety* for female protestors" (Buckley & Flegehheimer, 2011, p. A24, emphasis mine). Often news reports would mention how the safety tents were still not enough to keep the public space safe for women. For example, *The New York Times* in an article about the tents

ended the report with a paragraph on how the facilitator of Occupy's LGBT group knew of eighteen women who left the site because they feared for their own safety (Buckley & Flegenheimer, 2011).

Tents were both a site of protection and sexual assault, and it was presumed by news reports that even women's only tents were unlikely to stop sexual assault from occurring. The descriptions of Occupy Wall Street made it clear that this was not the place for women to spend time in, let alone spend the night. There was no escape from other protesters as sleeping arrangements were with others, and often with strangers. Sexual assault was something that was just bound to happen in a place like that. At the same time that the physical space of Occupy was deemed unsafe for women by newspaper coverage, women received the message that they could not be protected in the dangerous space that was Occupy Wall Street by their fellow male protesters or by the police.

Guilty by Association: The Men of Occupy

Despite the sheer number of people involved in the protest, the coverage of Occupy Wall Street presented the activists as a fringe group working outside the needs and experiences of normal Americans in which the individuals in the movement were constantly othered from mainstream society. The majority of the coverage from *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, presented members of Occupy Wall Street as violent and dangerous. Marking protesters as deviant is common in coverage of activism. Because activists are often challenging the status quo, they are seen as unruly disturbers of the established order (DeLuca, et al., 2012, p. 491). Stereotyping the protesters in this way does have implications for how the narratives of the sexual assault victims are discussed. By associating with the protesters, women in the movement were actively putting themselves in harm's way, which led others to blame them for their sexual assault. Newspaper coverage suggested that women who associated with these dangerous individuals should have known better and therefore the potential for sexual assault was an "occupational hazard." This is linked to the myth that certain

people are more likely to be rapists and are somehow different from other men (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Often sexual assault is seen as something that only strangers or criminals do, rather than acknowledging the fact that most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. By feeding into the myth that only deviant, treacherous men rape, representations in news media suggested that women should have expected this behavior from the men in the movement.

When writing about the sexual assaults cases in Occupy Wall Street, numerous articles made the link between the criminal records of the perpetrators and their involvement in the movement. One example of how crime was connected to sexual assault was the Barcliff sexual assault case, in which Barcliff raped a woman he met at an Occupy Wall Street event before pushing her off a pier where she sustained multiple injuries. Newspapers presented Barcliff as a hardened criminal, by mentioning that he did multiple stints in state prison, “was a serial parole violator” (Jacobs, 2011, para. 7), and had “charges of resisting arrest in front of Liberty Plaza, one of the demonstration sites, and then tried to escape” (Newman, 2011, para. 3) A follow up by *The New York Daily News* described him as “A known trouble maker at Occupy events” (Jacobs, 2011, para. 7). In another report of sexual assault at Occupy Wall Street, mentions how the assailant, David Park, had been arrested for disorderly conduct at a previous event and had numerous warrants out for him in both New York and his home state. *The New York Post* describes Park as “methadone-addled” and having “a hard time keeping his hands off the cheap booze and drugs and free food at the encampment- and women” (Freund, 2011, para 1, and 3). In this way Park was labeled an addict and his addiction was related to him perpetrating sexual assaults. Also Iketubosin, in a *New York Times* article, was said to have a sealed juvenile record (Grossman & Gardiner, 2011). In all these cases the newspaper accounts focus on the criminal element of the assaulter, as if their prior offences made them sexually assault their fellow protesters. Also important is that not only are these men criminals, but they were able to be active participants in the Occupy Wall Street protests.

Newspapers presented these men not as outliers in the movement, but as part of the leaders of the Occupy movement. In coverage of the sexual assaults, newspapers mentioned the roles the men played in the daily upkeep and day to day responsibilities of the movement. Barcliff was stated as being “a known presence at Occupy” (Newman, 2011, para. 2) and “known as a troublemaker at events.” (Jacobs, 2011, para. 7). In the case of Iketubosin, frequent mention was made to how he worked in one of the kitchens in the camp. Reports also stated that to make his victim feel comfortable sharing a tent with him, Iketubosin said he wouldn’t be in the tent often because he had to work in the kitchens. Iketubosin’s camp involvement was also used as a form of disbelief that he could do such a crime, with quotes from fellow protesters like “He was a genuinely nice guy...he came to get shit done,” (Gray, 2011, para. 2).

By focusing on the role these men had in Occupy, news coverage was sending the message that individuals were too trusting of the members of the movement with criminal records. As one quote from David Meyer, a professor who studies protest movements stated in an interview, “These protests have a history of welcoming everyone and just assuming they’re on your side” (Newcomb, 2011 para. 2). Sexual assault victims of Occupy Wall Street were deemed as placing themselves at risk by interacting with men whom were dangerous and prone to violence.

Women were cast as foolish for continuing to stay in a setting that allowed violence to occur and had criminals volunteer to help the movement. For example, *The New York Daily* interviewed a woman who stated, “Certainly women are the first target for any type of crazies, but I live in Park Slope and the rapists there are more scary” (Schapiro, Karolizsn, & Wills, 2011, p. 5). This protester could be read as foolish for admitting that violence against women is happening in the camp and despite this violence she continues to stay in the movement. It is also important to note that women are taught to avoid men thought to be dangerous, as a form of protection. Stanko (1988) argues that this myth means women can simply avoid these men

to circumvent rape. By marking Occupy Wall Street protesters as dangerous and violent, they would be seen as individuals that women should shun. In this way, women “should have known better” and were blamed for disregarding warnings and placing themselves in a violent situation.

Not only were the men of Occupy presented as dangerous, but interlaced through the coverage of Occupy Wall Street violence was the message that both the protesters and the police were unable to stop these men from staying in the camp. News coverage showed protestors failing to hold criminals responsible for their actions and law enforcement as unwilling to be involved. This message was articulated through news articles commenting on Occupy’s method of de-escalation, and protestors believing police failed to take crimes seriously within the camp. Women received the message they would have little to no protection from a constant news stream of coverage that questioned the safety of the camps and reports of continuing sexual assaults. This falls into the myth that if a woman wants to be safe and protected, she needs to be accompanied by a man, particularly in public spaces. Without men’s watchful eyes, it is up to women to protect themselves, and therefore they are responsible if they fail to stop violence from occurring. Madriz (1997) argues that even though women are taught to fear men, men are paradoxically seen as women’s “ultimate saviors” (p. 16). This is true in the case of Occupy Wall Street, where women were supposed to be wary of their fellow men protesters, while also looking to them for protection. Women in Occupy were blamed because they ventured into an unsafe public area without the protection of men, which caused them to be in a dangerous place and targets for violence.

The press represented members of the protest as poor protectors of women. A prominent critique from newspapers was that Occupy Wall Street handled crime internally through de-escalation rather than letting law enforcement handle cases (Buckley & Flegenheimer, 2011; Grossman & Firger, 2011; Schapiro, Einhorn, & Kennedy, 2011; Taylor, 2011). De-escalation, Chen et al. (2011) argues is a tactic in which members of the community surround the individual responsible for the crime, and using verbal communication, force the

individual to leave the camp or stop their behavior. This alternative to working with law enforcement is part of “community accountability” and is frequently used within activist communities of color and queer groups who often do not find the legal system “safe, relevant or useful” (p. 270). Community accountability tries to replicate the helpful functions of law enforcement, such as interrupting harmful acts, determining responsibility, and redressing harm outside the framework of the state. Because of the tension and increasing hostility between police officers and Occupy protesters, it makes sense that members of the movement would feel unsafe reporting crimes to the police.

The framing of the process presented by the press failed to address why a de-escalation method would be beneficial to protesters compared to engaging with law enforcement. Instead, coverage presented a condescending view of the process to argue that Occupy was not taking crime seriously within the camps and was allowing criminals to continue to wreak havoc. For example, Taylor (2011) at *The New York Times* referred to the process as “chastising perpetrators of crimes and ejecting them from the park” (p.A24). El-Ghobashy and Firger (2011) at *The Wall Street Journal* described it as “forcing out all but the worst offenders through public shaming” (p. A21). Frequently, these explanations of the process were not quoted from activists at Occupy, but rather by police officers and Mayor Bloomberg, who had a negative view of the movement. By failing to put de-escalation into a context of usefulness, and using negative connotation, the process was seen as illegitimate and not as successful as working with the police.

The negative coverage was further exacerbated by the fact that the de-escalation process was constantly referred to in articles that also focused on sexual assault cases within the camps. Sexual assaults in particular were used to discredit the accountability process by stating that the perpetrator of the sexual assault had already gone through the de-escalation process for a previous behavior. In the case of Iketubosin, after protesters kicked him out for sexually assaulting an 18 year-old woman, he was found trying to re-enter the camp while

protesters locked arms and attempted to stop him from entering. It was at this point that police were called to the scene (Dejohn & Kemp, 2011). Newspapers also stated that Iketubosin was being investigated for similar crime that occurred in the park days earlier (Grossman & Gardiner, 2011).

One example of the linkage between Iketubosin and de-escalation occurred in *The Wall Street Journal* by Grossman, and Gardiner (2011). After the article described de-escalation as “encircling troublemakers and publicly shaming them with taunts.” The article then mentions the Iketubosin case:

But that [de-escalation] doesn't always work. In the most recent alleged rape, the victim initially didn't want to report the case to police and the security tried to shame the suspect...When Mr. Iketubosin returned to the park Tuesday, he was recognized and the victim decided to report the incident to police. (p. A21)

De-escalation was used to provoke fear by giving examples of sexual assault cases. If de-escalation did not work, that meant rapists would continue to rape. Some protesters argued that sexual assault cases were not typically handled through de-escalation. One protestor stated, “If someone is smoking pot or having a beer, we will approach the person and try to moderate it, but if it's theft or a violent crime, we are going to report it to the police” (Schapiro et al., 2011, p.5). It is unknown how often de-escalation was used in sexual assault cases, but news coverage presented it as the norm.

The linkages between sexual assault and de-escalation not only provided a fear of sexual violence, but it blamed the victim of the assault for complying with the de-escalation process, which was seen as inappropriate behavior. *The New York Daily* news reported, “Tony Iketubosin, 26, was later charged with sexual abuse after the woman finally told the police he attacked her on October 25. Like DiGioia, she was hesitant to report the crime at the time” (Schapiro, Einhorn, & Kennedy, 2011, p. 5). By not reporting her sexual assault to the police, the unnamed victim allowed Iketubosin to “get away” allowing him to possibly sexually assault

another woman. While she is not blamed directly for her own assault, her actions led to other sexual assaults occurring in the camps.

The case of Lauren DiGioia is another example of a victim being blamed for not reporting. In a *New York Daily News* article, DiGioia explained how she did not mention her sexual assault to police until she learned that the individual was still in the park. She then recounted her experience with the police and their failure to help her. The police continued to blame her for the assault by stating she should not have slept in the park. DiGioia stated, "I'm a perfect example of somebody who went through the process. I followed all the steps of the law, and I felt victimized by it. I felt like I was a criminal, too." Later she stated, "I don't blame women for not wanting to come forward" (Schapiro, Einhorn, & Kennedy, 2011, p.5). She expresses her understanding and sympathy of why women do not come forward with their assaults. In this way, women maneuvering the dangerous space of Occupy could not rely on their fellow protesters, who rather than effectively dealing with sexual assault, often allowed their assailant go free because de-escalation failed to punish the perpetrator for their crime. In this way the public space of Occupy was seen as unsafe with the possibility of perpetrators of sexual assault lurking in the camp, even after being kicked out.

At the same time de-escalation wasn't working as an effective way of handling sexual assault, the police were also presented as unhelpful in protecting women. The newspaper articles frequently mentioned the rising conflict between police officers and protesters, which led police to develop a hands-off approach for dealing with the protestors (Buckley & Flegenheimer, 2011; Grossman & Firger, 2011; Schapiro, Einhorn, & Kennedy, 2011). While quotes by authority figures such as Mayor Bloomberg were used to convince readers why protesters should go to the police with their crimes, the protestors were arguing that law enforcement was ignoring their requests for help. In the words of one protestor, "I've seen the police again and again ignore complaints coming from inside the park." Another protestor said, "We've had the police say you need to deal with that yourselves" (Schapiro, Einhorn, & Kennedy, 2011, p.5).

The message received was that the protestors could not turn to police for support, even if they wanted to. This mixed with representations of a lawless society within the camp that created an image that Occupy Wall Street was unsafe for women, and that the people women are supposed to trust (such as the police) could not be counted on if women joined the Occupy movement.

Uncooperative policing was not just the opinion of the protestors, but also by the police themselves. One officer stated in a *New York Times* article, “We try to maintain a low profile and not antagonize the crowd” (Buckley & Flegenheimer, 2011, p.A24). Rather than actively trying to help with crime control, the police officers left the protestors mostly to their own devices. This lack of assistance was not seen as the fault of the police, but rather was blamed on the protestors. Law enforcement believed that having the police in the camps would only cause more violence. Taranto (2011a) states in his opinion article for *The Wall Street Journal*, “New York’s finest, in fact, are refusing to enforce the law for fear of provoking the so-called protestors to further violence” (para. 2). By representing the police as reluctant to enter the camp, women could expect that police would be unable to come to their rescue if something happened. This lack of safety was not the fault of the police, but portrayed as the fault of the protestors.

With this mentality, there was no guarantee that the police, who were at odds with the protestors, would necessarily protect victims. Women would be blamed for participating in a movement that not even the police would want to venture into for fear of violence. By placing themselves outside the safety of “good men” or police protection, they were at risk of violence from “bad” men. The press presented going to the police as both a viable and an unfeasible solution for the victims, which gave them no clear solution. The de-escalation process was not seen as successful in these articles and going to the police was not an option for the protestors. This placed women in a double bind where all of their options for handling their assaults have negative outcomes. They could not trust the police who will either ignore their crime, or as with DiGioia, blame them for the assault. Nor could they turn to the protestors and the de-escalation

process because the news presented various cases of sexual assault to demonstrate its failure. The implication was that women of Occupy could not defend themselves, and the only correct response regarding their safety would be to avoid the park all together.

Conclusion

Mayor Bloomberg of New York, the police, and various authorities used the constant discussion of violence in Occupy Wall Street as justification as to why the Occupy Wall Street movement should end. It was this constant threat of violence that caused Mayor Bloomberg to authorize the clearing of Zuccotti Park. The occupation, Bloomberg stated, was starting to pose a health and fire safety hazard to the protestors and to the surrounding community. With the clearing of the park, the Occupy Wall Street movement disbanded from its central location, but continued in smaller, local grassroots issues around the United States.

Looking at the newspaper coverage, the constant reporting of violence presented a discourse that displayed the physical space and the men of Occupy Wall Street as a threat towards women's safety. By entering a public space that featured violence, including sexual assault, women were risking their own safety to protest. Through the coverage women were told that it was better to stay at home than enter an environment that was dangerous and would be responsible for any sexual violence that occurred.

Representations of the camps were used to blame women for their assaults, by marking them as exceedingly dangerous. The articles focused on the physical space of Occupy as unsafe for women to be in. The representations presented of Occupy were reminiscent of a crime-ridden area where danger lurked behind tents. Women, who are taught to avoid dangerous areas for their own safety, were blamed for being in a space where rape was supposedly bound to happen.

At the same time, the men of Occupy were presented as deviant, dangerous, and capable of using violence to get what they wanted. By portraying these male activists as dangerous, women were blamed for putting themselves in harm's way by working with them.

Intertwined with the image of the male protester as a violent criminal, newspaper coverage blamed victims by alluding to the fact that women who participated in Occupy were without the safety of male protectors, which placed them at risk for sexual assault. The police and their fellow protesters were unable to guard women from sexual assault, with coverage representing the protestors as letting criminals escape and continuing to harm women. Law enforcement was unable to help within the camps and the protesters would not work with the police, both of which responses left women without a protector.

As consumers of news media we need to be diligent in remembering that the media, like other institutions, traditionally does not challenge social norms, but rather enforces the status quo. The construction of what is shown in various forms of media, whether it is newspapers, television, or music, is usually produced and promoted by those who have privilege in society. Positions of power in newsrooms are still mainly held by white men, and these individuals decide what stories get told and how those stories are represented. Often this means the viewpoint presented is a masculine perception of the world. When reading news stories about sexual violence it is important to ask the following questions. Who is writing the story? Who is being interviewed? What word choice and imagery is displayed? What is the story saying about women in relation to their sexual assault? These questions will allow readers to not take news coverage at face value, but consider how the stories fit into the larger context of violence against women.

At the same time, we as activists and academics need to hold journalists responsible for better coverage of sexual assault, especially when it is connected to protest and civil disobedience. One way to do so is by providing journalists with the tools to cover these cases fairly and without victim blaming narratives. This involves reaching out to journalists and providing them with resources in our communities to interview about sexual assault to balance the law enforcement that are interviewed. This can include sexual assault crisis center workers, women's centers, and professors specializing in sexual assault. Also it is important to provide

resources or toolkits to journalists to help reduce blame of the victim. This can include information on rape culture, victim blaming, and some simple dos and don'ts when covering cases. When a sexual assault case has been reported poorly by the news media, it is important to counter that story by writing letters to the editors or reaching out to editorial staff to let them know how their coverage is harmful towards sexual assault victims and providing alternative and better ways of covering sexual assault.

When journalists cover sexual assault within activist movements, it is important for them to recognize that sexual assault is a societal problem, not one that is only linked to certain populations. Coverage of these crimes should be placed in the larger context of violence against women, as well as the protests themselves. Journalists should also try and reflect upon their own biases relating to the movement and take steps to limit those biases in the coverage of the sexual assaults. This can include reaching out to leaders in the movement for comment and interviewing more women in their coverage.

Future Research

Using these results, future studies should continue to question how rape myths influence women's participation in the public sphere. As it relates to Occupy Wall Street, I encourage researchers to explore through interviews how women in the movement challenged this discourse, or how they reasoned why they should stay in the camps. Interviews would help to demonstrate how ideas of sexual terrorism are challenged and maintained by women in social movements. While this analysis showed characteristics of the discourse, interviews would allow for a more complex understanding of how the discourse of sexual assault myths influences women's participation in social movements. It would also be beneficial to examine more independent newspapers and blogs to see how their coverage of the assaults varied from the more mainstream reports. This would add more depth and understanding of the connections between the women of Occupy Wall Street and sexual assault cases.

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