

Asking for it? The Use of Blame in the Depiction of  
Sexual Assault Crime in Local English Canadian Newspapers

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***“A raped woman is framed socially and within the law as something broken. Neither Madonna nor whore but somewhere in between. The carrier of bad luck. There is a general but grudging acceptance that it isn’t really her fault, but if she had done something else, gone in another direction, not had that drink or worn that dress or smiled that way, it might never have happened..”<sup>1</sup>***

In August, 1986, Jane Doe was raped in her bedroom in her apartment in Toronto by a serial rapist. The man was eventually arrested and sentenced, but Doe, outraged that the Toronto Police failed to warn her and other residents that a rapist had been operating in her neighbourhood, successfully sued the Police Service in 1998. As a result of the civil suit, the Toronto Police Service under direction of the City of Toronto was told to change the way it processes sexual assault crimes. In interviews with journalists and police departments across Canada in 2004, it becomes clear that the Jane Doe civil suit has changed the way the information is released by police departments in sexual assault crimes across the country. I argue that with the increased use of police warnings across the country, the unintended outcome is that the victim is blamed for her sexual victimization, reinforcing the myth that women, through their behaviour, ask to be raped.

Myths can be defined as the stories society considers important.<sup>2</sup> Further, myths are told in such a way that all of society is convinced that they have salience.<sup>3</sup> According to Janice DuMont and Deborah Parnis, rape myths can be defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists.”<sup>4</sup> These myths are so embedded in our consciousness that they are often accepted without little contestation. This paper begins with an examination of the rape myths regularly employed in media stories about sexual violence. Using critical discourse and content analysis, it then examines the prevalence of these myths in six of Canada’s newspapers in 2002. Next, it looks to the use of police departments as the source of information about sexual assault. Finally, it examines the how the victim is blamed in the newspapers’ depictions of the crime.

## **Methodology**

Content analysis is defined as “objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in a text.”<sup>5</sup> By contrast, critical discourse analysis (CDA) builds on the quantitative aspects of content analysis, but it goes further. Critical discourse analysis is a “multidisciplinary approach to the study of language use and communication in their socio-cultural contexts.”<sup>6</sup> At its heart is an interest in understanding the role discourse plays in reproducing or challenging power relationships and privileges. More to the point, CDA focuses on the

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Doe, *The Story of Jane Doe: A book about rape* (Toronto: Random House, 2003) at 118.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*. (Malden: Blackwell, 2005) at 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Janice DuMont and Deborah Parnis, “Judging Women: the pernicious effects of rape mythology” (1999) 19 *Canadian Women’s Studies*. 102 at 102.

<sup>5</sup> W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Toronto: Allyn and Bacon, 2000) at 293.

<sup>6</sup> Teun van Dijk, *Racism and the Press*. (New York: Routledge, 1991) at 44.

news structures that play a role in reproducing, maintaining or challenging hegemony. News narratives are not like other narratives in that they do not tell stories in a sequential or chronological manner. Instead, the details journalists consider to be the most important are given first. Additionally, news “leaves many things unsaid. These must either be inferred for full comprehension or are routinely presupposed as general or more particular taken-for-granted information.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, news relies a great deal on the readers’ presupposed information – on their stereotypical beliefs – to get information across in a quick and concise manner. CDA provides a detailed examination of “the ways dominant discourses (indirectly) influence such socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies.”<sup>8</sup> More specifically, CDA seeks to “know how specific discourse structures determine specific mental processes, or facilitate the formation of specific social representations.”<sup>9</sup> Using CDA allows for a clearer understanding of the deeply embedded nature of the cultural scripts regarding sexual assault – scripts that are often employed with question or refutation to create a worldview that is inherently misogynistic.

Interviews were also integral to this analysis. I deliberately set up face-to-face interviews when possible with the newspaper reporters, editors and police rather than relying on surveys or telephone interviews. There were several reasons for this. First, people do not always complete and return their survey questionnaires on time, and conducting survey research can be quite time-consuming.<sup>10</sup> Second, I could probe the interviewees further for clarification on specific research questions. Perhaps more importantly, speaking face-to-face with individuals about their work provided me with an opportunity to create a rapport with those being interviewed. This is particularly important when understanding who was being interviewed. Because of the nature of their work, police officers and journalists tend to be suspicious of those with whom they have not built up a relationship of trust.<sup>11</sup> The face-to-face interview potentially alleviated some of those concerns. Finally, meeting face-to-face with the reporters in particular gave me the opportunity to see the working environment under which they select and filter information and frame their news stories.<sup>12</sup>

I conducted a census of all the newspaper stories that ran in 2002 with sexual assault as its main topic in the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Victoria Times Colonist*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Toronto Star* and the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*. The papers provided a combination of larger (*Toronto Star*) and smaller papers (*Victoria Times Colonist*), with a local or national focus and included two independent papers as well as those that belonged to large conglomerates. Additionally, the papers were chosen to represent Canadian regions and were located in the capital cities of the provinces in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid at 69.

<sup>8</sup> Teun van Dijk, “Principles of critical discourse analysis.” (1993) 4 *Discourse and Society*. 249 at 259.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods; Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Needham Heights: Pearson, 2000) at 272.

<sup>11</sup> Interview of Nick Pron, Police Reporter, *Toronto Star* (05 November 2004), telephone interview.

<sup>12</sup> Neuman, 273.

which they operate. In total, I examined 1532 stories that were available through the Factiva database and on microfilm.<sup>13</sup>

### **Understanding myths**

In her 1992 book on media depictions of rape crime, Helen Benedict outlines some of the basic myths that dominate our understanding about sexual assault. The first is the myth that rape is sex. This myth ignores the assaultive aspects of sexual assault and instead focuses on its sexual aspects. By doing so, it implies that the victim is unharmed by the crime. Another myth suggests that the assailant is crazy or perverted. Benedict argues that the image of the assailant as crazy contradicts the myth of the assailant as a normal hot-blooded male, but it is used “for times when the sex crime is extremely grotesque or when the victim cannot easily be pegged as having provoked it.”<sup>14</sup> Another myth suggests that the assailant is more likely to be black or lower class. Benedict conducted her analysis in the United States with its racist stereotypes regarding the sexual behaviour of African-American. In Canada, the myth of the sexual perpetrator as being from another race may be extended to include aboriginal or immigrant men.

The remaining six myths deal specifically with the behaviour of the female victim, the first of which is that women provoke rape. This ties in quite nicely to the rape is sex myth and is so deeply entrenched in our cultural scripts about sexual assault, that both the perpetrator and the victim believe it. As Benedict points out, most commonly “rape is a crime of opportunity: the victim is chosen not because of her looks or behaviour, but because she is there.”<sup>15</sup> The next myth is that women deserve rape. In this myth, women are seen as behaving “carelessly prior to the crime” and thus, it is the woman’s fault for “enticing” her perpetrator.<sup>16</sup> Another myth suggests that only loose women can be raped. Again, this suggests that through their behaviour, women provoke rape and completely belies the fact that “babies, children and elderly women are raped.”<sup>17</sup> The rape myth that the sexual attack sullies the victim works in contradiction with the myth that only slutish women can be raped. It provides a circular logic to the stereotypes regarding sexual assault in that women would not be raped if they did not act in a loose manner and provoke the attack and when they are raped, they are no longer considered pure women and thus become unworthy of protection by the family unit.<sup>18</sup>

Another myth is the idea that rape is seen as a kind of karmic justice – a punishment for mistakes made in a past life. This one is not limited to just sexual assault crimes, but it continues the blaming of the victim for culpability in the crime. As Benedict points out, “if we believe that victims bring on their misfortunes because of past bad behaviour, then we can convince ourselves that we are immune by virtue of having been ‘good’.”<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> I wish to thank Sandy Hager for conducting the intercoder reliability on the data. 30% of the stories were chosen at random and coded independently by Sandy for an agreement rate of 82% -- well within the range of acceptance.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes*. (New York: Oxford, 1992) 15.

<sup>15</sup> Benedict, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

final myth documented by Benedict is the idea that women cry rape for revenge. In this myth, women are depicted as lying about sexual assault to get back at a man or to “simply get attention” and it is one that has been popular for thousands of years.<sup>20</sup>

While some of Benedict’s myths remain dominant with slight modifications, others did not appear to have much salience and were used in less than 10% of the stories with a rape myth. Overall, I determined that there were five dominant rape myths that were used in at least 10% of the stories in 2002. These rape myths are that: rape is sex; innocent men are being accused of sexual assault and its corollary that women lie about rape; the rapist is the “other;” the perpetrator is a good man and its corollary that his victim has a bad reputation; and finally the victim through her actions provoked the sexual assault. It is the rape myth that the victim’s behaviour provoked the attack is the myth that I want to examine in more detail in this paper.

### Content Analysis of Rape Myths

Overall, rape myths were used in 58.4% of the news stories on sexual assault in both national newspapers (279 stories). Close to 60% (59.5%) of the coverage in the *National Post* (147 stories) contained a rape myth and 57.1% of the *Globe and Mail*’s stories (132) featured a rape myth. Neither national paper was more likely than the other to use rape myths.

**Table 6.1: Rape myths by national newspaper**

	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	Total
Yes	147	132	279
% within paper	59.5%	57.1%	58.4%
No	100	99	199
% within paper	40.5%	42.9%	41.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>478</b>
<b>% within paper</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of the stories in the local papers also contained rape myths. However, overall, the local newspapers ran slightly fewer stories with a rape myth than the national newspapers. In total, 56.1% of the stories (591 stories) contained a rape myth in the local papers compared to 58.4% nationally (278 stories). Only one local newspaper had a higher percentage of rape myths in its stories than did the national newspapers -- the *Toronto Star* at 60.5% (178 stories). The newspaper with the lowest number of rape myths was the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* at 51.0% (157 stories). The *Free Press* ran 54.2% of its stories with a rape myth (110 stories) and the *Times Colonist* had 58.6% of its stories with a rape myth (146 stories).

**Table 6.2: Rape myths by local newspaper**

	<i>Victoria T.C.</i>	<i>Winnipeg F.P.</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	<i>Halifax C.H.</i>	Total
Yes	146	110	178	157	591
% within paper	58.6%	54.2%	60.5%	51.0%	56.1%
No	103	93	116	151	463
% within paper	41.4%	45.8%	39.5%	49.0%	43.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>1054</b>
<b>% within paper</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

It is the myth that the victim's behaviour provoked that attack that I am most interested in, because I argue it is the one myth that can be most easily addressed by changing the actions of police department who are instrumental in the application of this myth.

### **Police as a source**

In all of the cities it becomes clear that the police are the gatekeepers when it comes to the initial release of information about sexual offences. However, it also becomes clear that the police do not release information about all the sexual assault crimes committed. In 2002, the Toronto Police Service released 214 news releases that related to sexual assault which only reflects about 8% of the overall crimes reported in that city in that year.<sup>21</sup> By comparison, the Halifax Regional Police sent out three news releases regarding sexual assault crimes in 2002,<sup>22</sup> representing fewer than 1% of the sexual offences reported. The Winnipeg Police Service distributed 44 news releases that related to sexual assault in 2002, or about 6% of the sexual offences reported.<sup>23</sup> The Victoria Police Department does not have a centralized office responsible for sending out news releases and thus, it was not possible to access the news releases for 2002.<sup>24</sup>

In coverage of sexual assault stories at the national level, it becomes clear that the police have access to the media. The first person quoted most often in both national newspapers was a police officer (in 19.5% of the coverage or 74 stories). In the *Post*, a police officer was quoted first in 17.3% of the stories (33 stories), while in the *Globe*, s/he was quoted in 21.7% of the stories (41 stories). As expected, the local papers also relied heavily on the police for information. The most frequent source quoted first was the police department (22.3% or 207 stories). The *Toronto Star* quoted the police first in 32.8% of its stories (81 stories), and the *Free Press* used a police officer first in 23.8% of its stories (41 stories). A police officer was quoted first in the *Victoria Times Colonist* in 22.3% of its stories (51 stories). Remarkably, the victim was the most frequent first source in Halifax, being quoted in 16.5% of the stories in 2002 (46 stories). This reinforces the assertion that the more involved the police department is in sending out news releases, the more the media rely on it for information about sexual assault. As I explore later, the Victoria and Halifax police departments were less hands-on in their approach with the newspapers and did not actively send out news releases.

As I indicated, that the victim's behaviour somehow caused her/he to be sexually victimized was a dominant myth in 2002 and was found in 10.6% of the stories (162 stories) on sexual assault. It included newspaper accounts warning women about rapists operating in their neighbourhoods. The practise of warning women has met with

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<sup>21</sup> The news releases for 2002 were provided to me by the Toronto Police Service by John Angus, the Webmaster for Corporate Communications.

<sup>22</sup> The news releases were taken off the website of the Halifax Regional Police on October 23, 2004 by accessing: <http://www.police.halifax.ns.ca/menu.asp>.

<sup>23</sup> The news releases were given to me by Constable Shelly Glover, the Public Information Officer for the Winnipeg Police Service's Public Affairs Unit on 03 June 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Interview of Constable Rick Anthony, Downtown Resource Officer, Targeted Policing Division, Victoria Police Department (02 November 2004) in person at the Victoria Police Department Headquarters.

considerable criticism by feminists and victims. As Jane Doe writes, the warnings “we are accustomed to hearing are both stupid and outrageous and call on a large group of people to censor their lives.”<sup>25</sup> The news reports informed by the police warnings make it clear to women “what actions and locations are unsafe, influencing decisions about where to go, what to wear, how to act, how late to stay out. It tells all of us how society views male acts of violence direct at women, delimiting what may be acceptable or unacceptable behaviour for both women and men.”<sup>26</sup> As Geraldine Finn points out, news stories on rape “keep women nervous and they keep us in our proper place – subordinate and submissive to men.”<sup>27</sup> Women who are raped, particularly women who have a sexual past, pay the ultimate price for ignoring societal conditions and socially constructed sex roles.

Police warnings were issued in news releases by all the police departments as a public safety issue in 2002, but they were offered in greater volume by Toronto and Winnipeg police. Shelly Glover, the Public Information Officer with the Winnipeg Police Service, says she makes a point of choosing her words carefully when issuing warnings to the media about sexual assault crimes:

In a case like that, when you’re warning women to be careful, careful may not be the word, it should be, to be alert. And certainly if I even as a 30-something-year old woman, if I see that in the newspaper, it’s two blocks from my home, I appreciate it. To be alert, to be aware, careful won’t be something we would be saying because that suggests its something that the victim could have done. We’re suggesting you be alert because he’s out there.<sup>28</sup>

According to Mark Pugash with the Toronto Police Service detailed information is important:

They can then make choices depending on the information that we provide to them. I think that our view (and it extends beyond sexual assault cases) is that in a wide variety of offences where there is a threat we provide people with information. They can then make their decisions as to what they want to do. At the same time, we hope the information we provide leads to catching people who are committing these crimes.<sup>29</sup>

Pugash says that providing women with warnings gives them the opportunity to protect themselves. He says this means that the information provided must be meaningful and detailed and that police are providing only facts or tools which they can effectively use.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Doe, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Marian Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) at 3.

<sup>27</sup> Geraldine Finn, “Taking Gender in Account in the ‘Theatre of Terror’: Maintenance of Male Dominance,” (1989-1990) *CJWL*. 375 at 387.

<sup>28</sup> Interview of Shelly Glover, Constable, Winnipeg Police Service (03 June 2004) in person in Winnipeg.

<sup>29</sup> Interview of Mark Pugash, Director of Corporate Communications, Toronto Police Service (28 October 2004) in person in Toronto.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

I agree that woman should be made aware about sexual violence in their neighbourhoods, but I assert that sexual assault crimes cannot be treated in the same manner as crimes like assault or robbery simply because attitudes about sexual assault crimes are shaped by these deeply ingrained myths. Thus, releasing information about what an individual can do to protect themselves from identity theft or assault does not have the same effect as releasing information about what a victim can do to protect herself from rape. As Doe writes, women already know how to protect themselves.<sup>31</sup> She suggests instead that police departments should give women information that “does not interfere with (their) investigation. Give us dates, times, locations, any description (they) might have and let us work in the community to craft solutions and to support (the police) and each other.”<sup>32</sup> Second, by warning women about the stranger assault, police ignore the reality that the majority of sexual assaults occur between people who know each other. As Doe argues, the impact of “stranger danger” warnings is that it “creates a climate of fear that ensures a large degree of control over how and where women live.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Critical Discourse Analysis – How the Victim is Blamed**

To be categorized as a story that contained a rape myth that blamed the victim, the stories not only contained straight police warnings, but also contained information about what the victim did prior to the attack. For example, if the newspaper account suggested that the woman was walking alone, late at night, or if it said that the victim had been drinking prior to the assault. Again, this information would be made known to the newspapers predominantly through police sources, although some of it was made available from court transcripts, but these numbers were limited. In 2002, the victim provoking sexual assault myth was used in 10.6% of the stories (162 stories) on sexual assault. The *National Post* used the myth in 6.5% of its stories (16 stories), while the *Globe* used it in 13.6% of its stories (22 stories). Five of the *Post* stories and six of the *Globe* stories referred to the victim drinking before the sexual assault. Three of the *Globe* stories also featured police warnings about victims’ behaviour. In one story, police warned women to “not walk alone in secluded areas.”<sup>34</sup> In another story, police cautioned parents and caregivers to “be vigilant in street-proofing children.”<sup>35</sup> In yet another story, police warned women “never to leave their drinks unattended at social events” because of the use of date-rape drugs.<sup>36</sup> In these stories, it is women’s behaviour that is being singled out as the causal factor.

The myth that the victim provoked the sexual assault was also dominant in the local papers. This myth was used in 11.8% (124) of the stories in the local newspapers in 2002. What is particularly interesting is that the *Toronto Star* was statistically more

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<sup>31</sup> Doe, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Allan Woods “Victim of sexual assault had infectious disease” *Globe and Mail* (22 July 2002) A12.

<sup>35</sup> “Peel police warn of Brampton pedophile” *Globe and Mail* (25 April 2002) A24.

<sup>36</sup> Andre Picard “Quebec girl gang raped, police suspect drink spiked” *Globe and Mail* (14 October 2002) A2.



likely than any of the other local newspapers to use this myth.<sup>37</sup> In total, 15.0% of the *Star*'s stories suggested that the victim's behaviour provoked the attack (44 stories).

The *Winnipeg Free Press* also had a high proportion of its news reports containing the rape myth that the victim provoked the assault by her behaviour. It appeared in 15.3% of the stories (31 stories) in the *Free Press*. Halifax used this myth in 10.4% of its stories (32 stories) and in Victoria it was used in 6.8% of the stories (17 stories). It becomes clear that the more involved the police departments are in communities, the higher the likelihood that the rape myth blaming the victim will be used. As indicated, both the Toronto and Winnipeg Police Service sent out regular news releases about sexual violence, while Halifax and Victoria did not. In all the newspapers, the police are the most frequent source in stories that blamed the victim.

Examples of Toronto stories that were determined to be blaming the victim included the story of a 19-year old woman raped and killed by a serial killer. Police were quoted in the story as saying the victim was "walking along a dimly lit sidewalk near CFB Trenton" at night.<sup>38</sup> The inclusion of the words dimly lit suggests clearly that the woman was doing what she had been warned not to do. She was exposing herself to danger by walking in an unsafe place. If police were wanting to protect women, why did they not release the actual location of the dimly lit street? Or urge city officials to install better lighting?

In another story, Toronto police said a woman was bound, robbed and sexually assaulted in her apartment. Police said the man "buzzed from the lobby and (the victim) thought it was her husband coming home"<sup>39</sup> suggesting that the woman's actions provided the perpetrator access to her apartment. Police in Don Mills also warned women to be "extremely cautious" after a 20-year old woman was raped when a man followed her home after she got off a bus.<sup>40</sup> Five other women had been accosted by a man in that area in a four-month period, but the police did not talk about increasing patrols in the area.<sup>41</sup> Instead, it is women who must remain vigilant.

As stated earlier, the police in Winnipeg were much more careful in the language they used to warn women about sexual predators. In a story that ran on February 16, 2002, the police "advised" Winnipeg residents that a serial rapist was being released back to the public and was at risk to re-offend. The *Free Press* used the word "warn" in its description of the story in its headline and its opening paragraph.<sup>42</sup> I argue that changing the police advisory to a police warning has a punitive effect in that a warning suggests

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<sup>37</sup> 35.5% in the *Star* compared to 13.7% in the *Times Colonist*, 25.0% in the *Free Press*, and 25.8% in the *Chronicle Herald*; significant at  $p < .01$ .

<sup>38</sup> Michelle Shephard "Tracking a deadly predator in wake of Bernardo" *Toronto Star* (06 January 2002) A01.

<sup>39</sup> "Toronto news" *Toronto Star* (18 February 2002) B03.

<sup>40</sup> Cal Millar "Serial sexual predator warning – sixth woman attacked in Don Mills, police say" *Toronto Star* (19 April 2002) B03.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Owen "Sex offender free, police warn public. They expect he'll live in city, reoffend" *Winnipeg Free Press* (16 February 2002) A18.

there was something that an individual can do to prevent sexual assault, while an advisory does not carry that connotation.

There were other stories in which the police in Winnipeg did issue warnings. The rapes of elderly women in a Winnipeg neighbourhood prompted police to release a composite sketch of the offender and warn women to take precautions. A police sergeant told reporters that “if elderly women are out walking alone, they should get someone to walk with them. We don’t want them locking themselves up in their homes, but they should take precautions.”<sup>43</sup> In an investigation of two separate sexual assaults in September 2002, a police spokesperson suggested that “if women believe they’re being followed by someone suspicious they should keep their distance as best as possible and go into the nearest business to contact police.”<sup>44</sup> It is interesting that in these stories, there is no warning to the perpetrators that the police are stepping up efforts to ensure that they will be caught and prosecuted. Additionally, when police release warnings about sexual assault crimes it is without context. There is no understanding why women are walking late at night. Is it because the transit system in their city is unsupervised? Is it because they are shift-workers? The underlying assumption about the victim’s behaviour is that she was being reckless and irresponsible.

As stated earlier, the cities in which police departments were not as actively involved in sending out news releases had significantly fewer stories that contained a myth blaming the victim; however, there were still some instances in which the victim was blamed. In Halifax and Victoria, the majority of these stories came out of court coverage. For example, in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* court story in which a former police chief was found guilty of sexually assaulting a 14-year old girl, the perpetrator is quoted claiming “the girl made advances before he fondled her.”<sup>45</sup> In Victoria, for example, a story covering the trial of a man charged with sexual assault opened with this statement: “A 16-year old Victoria girl admitted Wednesday she made a mistake getting into a van with a stranger in downtown Victoria in February 2000.”<sup>46</sup> This type of victim blaming, whether by the police, the victim’s family or the perpetrator reiterate the sexual assault myth that suggest it is the (female) victim’s behaviour and not the (male) perpetrator’s that must be controlled.

## Conclusion

Using content and critical discourse analysis, this paper examines the prevalence of rape myths in six English Canadian newspapers in 2002. I assert that one myth – the myth that a victim’s behaviour provokes his or her victimization -- is exacerbated by the police, who suggest that if women just did one thing differently, they would not be raped. If women did not buzz in strangers into their apartment buildings, walk down dimly lit streets, drink in excess, or take transit at night, they would be safe. This myth works at

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<sup>43</sup> Bruce Owen “8<sup>th</sup> woman attacked. Sexual predator steps up violence in latest assault” *Winnipeg Free Press* (05 October 2002) A1.

<sup>44</sup> “In brief” *Winnipeg Free Press* (28 September 2002) A8.

<sup>45</sup> Ian Fairclough “Doctor, cop sentence for sex assaults. Ex-police chief Martin jailed for one year” *Halifax Chronicle Herald* (21 September 2002) A1.

<sup>46</sup> Sandra McCulloch “Girl admits making mistake when she got into man’s van” *Victoria Times Colonist* (22 August 2002) B2.

controlling the behaviour of women, while the actions of the perpetrator are tolerated. I argue that police departments can and should be doing more to ensure that they are not seen as unnecessarily blaming the victim. As Doe suggests, police should provide women with real information that they can use rather than information that they already know.

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