

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ILLICIT TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS:

A MEDIA ANALYSIS

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DEDICATION

To my family for always being there for me and for being my best cheerleaders;
to my parents for their lifelong support and encouragement; and to all of my family
members who were public school teachers – true heroes.

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ABSTRACT

LINDA A. LANCASTER

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ILLICIT TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS: A MEDIA ANALYSIS

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Teacher sexual misconduct has received widespread media attention. The focus of this study is to examine and analyze online news articles about cases involving teacher-student participants. The goal is to investigate how sexual misconduct by teachers is portrayed by media. Most research has been journalistic in nature. Therefore, journalists are filters for the narratives that surround each case. While sexual abuse of students is a serious issue, it has failed to garner a consolidated effort to provide preventative methods.

Quantitative methods are used in analysis of the demographic characteristics, while qualitative methods are used to examine terminology in news articles. By combining content analysis with critical discourse analysis, I am able to examine data from 308 news articles involving 104 Texas teachers from 2014.

Findings show that media coverage differs based on gender, race, and age of participants. Terminology in each article frames the participants in a precise manner and highlights particular details. In addition, certain types of cases receive national and international coverage, while others are ignored. Media coverage of teacher misconduct cases is a complex issue involving factors such as language, headline choices, bias, and stereotypes. Preventative measures will require this issue to be seen as a harmful social problem. Since media has the power to influence public opinion, understanding media's role is a key component.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

As Judge Louis Sturns sentenced an ex-teacher and coach to seven years in a Texas prison for sexually abusing a student, his words to the defendant included this admonishment: “Parents should be able to send their children to school without the children being victimized: when that happens, it compromises the entire system of education” (Mitchell 2016). Sexual misconduct by educators, either in the classroom, on the sports field, or in extracurricular programs, is a growing concern for parents, schools, and communities across the United States. However, since most of the information on this topic comes from a journalistic perspective rather than from legal or academic research, inflammatory media coverage utilizing inaccurate terminology and biased headlines may have an impact on how teacher sexual abuse is perceived by the public and by stakeholders. In the Texas case cited above, the headline did not mention sexual assault or rape of a minor. Instead, the story’s headline was “Ex-Teacher’s Aide in Mansfield Gets 7 Years for Having Sex with a Student.” How these news reports are constructed by the media and whether they are fair and accurate or simply driven by market-share desires by newspaper, online, and television outlets are substantial issues to consider.

To highlight some data to illustrate the problem of educator sex abuse, an Associated Press report found that 2,570 educators had their teaching certificates

removed for sexual misconduct during a four-year span between the years 2001 to 2005 (Mullins 2013). Every year in the United States, approximately 400 teachers are charged with sexual contact with students (Morgenbesser 2010:367). Currently, according to Terry Abbott, a former Houston school administrator and now a consultant, Texas leads the nation in teacher sexual misconduct cases with over 100 documented cases in 2014 alone (Ober and Seibert 2014:4). Although it is difficult to ascertain due to the lack of comprehensive data on the problem, the number of these cases appears to be on the rise across the United States and beyond. One possible reason for the increase might be increased reporting. As an example of this problem, the number of teachers in North Carolina who had their teaching licenses revoked has doubled over the last 10 years to over 800, half of those because of inappropriate sexual relationships with a student (Rodriguez 2015:2) In fact, one online article suggested that “a U.S. teacher ‘sexpidemic’ was spreading across the planet” (*World Net Daily* 2005:1).

The spectrum of sexual offenses by educators ranges from sexual harassment to sexual abuse to sexual violence. Students in the classroom and in extracurricular activities are highly susceptible to grooming by authoritative figures in an educational setting. Brackenridge (1997:117) provides a comprehensive list of what she calls ‘invasion without consent’ to include:

- written or verbal abuse or threats
- sexually oriented comments
- jokes, lewd comments, or sexual innuendoes
- taunts about body, dress, marital status, or sexuality
- ridiculing of performance
- sexual or homophobic graffiti
- practical jokes based on sex

- intimidating sexual remarks, propositions, invitations, or familiarity
- domination of meetings, play space, or equipment
- condescending or patronizing behavior undermining self-respect or performance
- physical contact, fondling, pinching, or kissing
- offensive phone calls or photos
- bullying based on sex

Communications technology and social media have added a complex component by blurring the lines of simple communication with inappropriate contact between an adult and a minor. Grooming initially can take place via a simple text, a gesture, or any other seemingly innocuous act that tests and then conditions the targeted student for sexual abuse. Brackenridge (1997:117) provides a definition of sexual abuse that involves:

- exchange of reward or privilege for sexual favors
- rape
- anal or vaginal penetration by penis, fingers, or objects
- forced sexual activity
- sexual assault
- physical/sexual violence
- groping
- indecent exposure
- incest

In addition to sexual abuse by classroom teachers, the coaching profession has been hit by sexual abuse allegations. Because sexual crimes often go unreported and perpetrators go unpunished, Brackenridge (1994:293) estimates that coaches who sexually abuse their athletes have committed approximated 80 offenses before being challenged or arrested. A survey of retired Olympic athletes from Canada by Brackenridge and Kirby (1997:10) showed that almost 22 percent of respondents had engaged in sexual intercourse with authority figures during their sports training careers.

Despite widespread media coverage at local, national, and international levels, institutional responses to this problem have ranged from denial to obstruction/resistance to reluctant acceptance and then finally to advocacy (Brackenridge and Kirby 1997:9).

Students who participate in athletics or extracurricular school activities are particularly susceptible to sexual harassment and assaults by coaches, music directors, or club sponsors. Buchwald (2008:672) reported that one-in-five female athletes were sexually harassed or abused by their coaches. The extra time spent with students outside of the school day and away from other adults gives coaches and sponsors unsupervised access to youngsters in middle school and high school. Buchwald (2008:672) also states that some of the mitigating factors in athletic programs can be seen in the “physical nature of sports, the emphasis on the athletes’ bodies, and the close contact between coaches and players.” Students, athletes, and other young adults who participate in extracurricular activities are in subordinate positions and are often “silenced” by a loss of confidence in their cognitive abilities after the instance of sexual harassment (Stepp 2001: 36).

At the crux of the issue of media reports of educator sexual misconduct is whether the cases are covered in an accurate, and consistent manner. Ross points out the influence of the media and the potential impact of imbalance in news reports (2002:113):

News media do not merely report the important events of the day, they decide what are the important events of the day – they construct the agenda, if not telling us what to think then at least tell us what to think about.

In today’s world of competitive cable news outlets and with the need to get breaking news on the air first, it has been proposed that accuracy takes a backseat as media utilize

shortcuts and rely on easy-access details to keep pace with their competitors. In addition, Breen's analysis of news coverage of the Irish Catholic clergy sex abuse scandal led him to conclude that newspaper readers and television viewers are "force-fed a selective and small number of child abuse cases involving clergy with a constant flow of headlines seeking to discredit anything Catholic" (Breen 2000:333). Consequently, the public seems to be faced with the daunting challenge of wading through sketchy information, half-truths, and misrepresentations.

Female teachers charged with sexual misconduct involving adolescent victims seem to generate the most attention, with a wide range of media coverage. Within news outlets, there is a vast difference in how these cases are reported and often times, the public is at a loss to comprehend the magnitude of these offenses. One researcher points it out best with the following observation:

Despite the statistical reality that the overwhelming majority of sexual predators are men, the media can't resist giving disproportionate coverage to cases where the female teacher is young, white, and conventionally pretty. Sometimes, the effect of the salacious coverage is to minimize the very real harm that rape can do to boys. (Schwyzer 2012:1)

As of late, the criminal actions of female educators seem to be lost among the tawdry and salacious details and news photos. In fact, even the professionals who deal with these cases, administrators, law enforcement, the judicial system, the media, and members of the public, cannot seem to agree on the terminology that surrounds incidents of sexual abuse of students by female teachers. A search of the *Texas Penal Code* finds that teachers are currently being charged with "Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student" in accordance with Title 5, Chapter 21, Section 21.12 (Texas Penal Code:

2015). Student sexual abuse was previously referred to as ‘institutional sexual assault’ as well, so the shifting of terminology has played a part in the confusion by stakeholders. Miller referred to the acts as “institutional malfeasance” because the educational system takes precedence over the well-being of individuals (Miller et al. 2014:63).

Maxwell (2010) addressed the role of journalists who intentionally or unintentionally frame these stories of illicit sexual acts and consequently shape public opinion and discourse. An example can be seen in a recent news article concerning the arrest of an adult male who was arrested for soliciting a 9-year-old girl via cell phone. While the article reported that the man was accused of online solicitation of a minor, it also quoted a police source who said, “We’re doing forensics on his cellphone to determine if there are other victims that he already had relationships with” (Nagy 2016). The use of the word ‘relationship,’ while unintentional, is a misnomer which can serve to diminish the seriousness of sexual assault and also disregards the fact that a child is not legally able to consent to sexual activity. This example also serves as a perfect illustration between the linking of sexual assaults with the use of technology such as cell phones, computers, the Internet, and social media sites. This appears to be another common trend in media coverage of sexual assaults involving minors.

At the same time, media can be responsible for creating awareness, influencing public policy, prioritizing governmental expenditures, and developing preventative measures (Tonmyr & Jack 2010:82). Many questions arise from the media portrayal of these events. How do current news articles refer to these incidents? Are they ‘improper relationships’ or ‘sexual misconduct’ or ‘criminal sexual assaults?’ One recent term,

‘child maltreatment’ was coined to include physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, or neglectful abuse (Burgess, Welner, and Willis 2010:387). Is the instance a case of ‘an affair’ or a case of ‘rape?’ Are the teachers guilty of ‘bad moral decisions’ or are they ‘predatory rapists?’ Johnson (cited in Losecke and Best 2003:270) insists that media saturation and distortion of social problems results in a “psychological numbing” that leads to apathy or cynicism that culminates in total inaction by the public and by professionals in the field of education. Exploration of how the media sets the tone in its coverage of cases can yield valuable information from a scientific standpoint, rather than from a journalistic perspective because under the law, these educators could be classified and required by law to register as sex offenders.

There is a shortfall in research on how the media reacts to these stories based on the gender of the assailant and/or victim. Does the male perpetrator ‘sexually assault’ a student while the female perpetrator is guilty of simply ‘crossing a boundary’ of decency? Is there a tendency to view only teenage female students involved in these cases as ‘victims,’ while the teenage male students are viewed as ‘lucky’ and cases of ‘boys-will-be-boys?’ The Mary Kay Letourneau case illustrates this gender discrepancy in media coverage. Even though Letourneau, an elementary teacher, received a 7 ½ year suspended sentence having sex with her former sixth grade student, who was 12 years old, media assessments of Letourneau cast her as either a “sexual predator, a mentally ill woman, or as a champion of forbidden love” (Sutherland 2003:319). Instead of portraying the female offenders as rapists, the media teases the public with glamour-shots of attractive teachers, most notorious of those being Mary Kay Letourneau, Debra LeFavre, and

Pamela Smart (Stasi 2015). Male teachers and coaches who engage in sexual acts with adolescent students seem to be treated differently than female teachers and coaches by the media, law enforcement, the judicial system, and by the general public. Sexual abuse by educators reinforces the need for serious investigation of gender and sexual stereotypes in media coverage of these cases.

The gender of the victim is certainly a factor in teacher sexual abuse cases, although research seems limited on this topic. More and more cases are being publicized in news reports that shed light on victimization based on gender roles. Stepp (2001:34) points to the Supreme Court decision, *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, which requires schools to pay damages for failing to protect students from sexual harassment under the Title IX Amendment of 1972. Schwyzer (2011:2), a gender studies researcher, illustrates a case in which a female teacher faced discipline charges and harsh public scrutiny, while the male student walks around like a conquering hero walking through the school hallways to impress other guys. Do journalists refer to these female teachers as “cougars” if the victim just happens to be an adolescent male? Is a female teacher simply “well-meaning” and is she participating in a “harmless initiation into sexuality?” (Knoll 2010:372).

In addition to gender, another area lacking exploration is the issue of how the media has overlooked the element of the power differential in illicit teacher-student relationships. Hansen reports the problem of limited formal social science research to examine the role of the media in shaping public images of teachers (2013:28). This study seeks to address this gap in the literature. Even if the student is a legal adult, he or she

cannot consent to sexual contact with a school employee. Educators hold a position of authority over students, even if those students are over the age of legal consent. Are these cases portrayed differently in the media in both written text and media photos? Has the public been desensitized into believing that these relationships are permissible? Has the media blurred the lines of what is appropriate?

Media attention has focused on these cases because they are intriguing and provide us with details involving sex, criminal acts, and reckless behavior among a population of adults who are charged with teaching our youth. Graves (1994:10) reports on the “Anita Hill Syndrome,” which refers to the increased awareness of sexual abuse because of Hill’s graphic details during televised testimony of sexual harassment during confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Suddenly, the window shades were thrust open by media outlets across the board, while the public clamored for more explicit details about illicit teacher-student relationships. Yet, despite media attention and heightened awareness, there has been little research on the nature and range of the problem that plagues our education system. As Shakeshaft and Cohan (1995:522) pointed out, the adolescent victims are routinely ostracized and looked upon with utter contempt by their classmates, teachers, and the community. School officials are charged with protecting students from physical and psychological harm and parents trust that their children are being cared for in a positive, nurturing, and safe environment. This all-important trust is being slowly and systematically eroded with each case of teacher sexual abuse.

How does the issue emerge as a social problem? How does the issue gain enough traction for parents, administrators, law enforcement, and the general public to reach a tipping point and say “enough is enough”? Why is there a lack of outrage, marches, and media exposure designed to stop child sexual abuse by teachers, coaches, and other school personnel? Given that Texas apparently leads the nation in teacher sexual abuse cases, one would assume that an organized effort is in place to decrease this type of criminal activity in Texas classrooms.

In an effort to address these limitations, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine media portrayals of details surrounding reported cases of teachers involved with sexual misconduct with adolescent students. This is accomplished through a content analysis combined with a critical discourse analysis of media portrayals of teacher-student sexual misconduct cases from the state of Texas in 2014. The analyses specifically focus on the terminology used in journalistic reports from online newspaper, radio, and television sources.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate how sexual misconduct is reported in media reports. Further rationales are:

- 1) to contribute to the social construction literature
- 2) to contribute to the understanding of the role of the media in shaping public policy
- 3) to contribute to public policy implications used by legislators, educators, and others

As teacher sexual misconduct cases continue to be featured by both serious and sensationalistic media outlets, conversations about this topic have failed to compel a

realistic and preventative response by school officials and legal professionals who are assigned the task of protecting students. A 2007 *USA Today* report estimated that approximately three educators are accused of sexual abuse of students every school day. (Irvine and Tanner 2007:1). Additionally, even though the phenomenon of teacher-student relationships is not new, the number of cases and the media coverage have seemingly increased significantly in Texas, which leads the U.S. in teacher sex cases with 100, compared to second-place Pennsylvania, which had 37 (Oberg and Seibert 2014:4). Mullins (2013:1) points to numbers that state that 2,570 educators in the U.S. have had their teaching certificates removed for sexual misconduct allegations during a four-year period from 2001 to 2005. Are we actually seeing an extraordinary number of cases and pattern of sexual abuse or are has there been an increase in the number of students now actually reporting abuse to the authorities? Or, has the media coverage increased in dramatic and manipulative fashion simply to entice the public to view these stories?

This dissertation seeks to strengthen academic research in the area of teacher-student sexual misconduct by focusing on media portrayal and by looking at specific terminology used in reporting these events to the public. This research is significant because it permits the analysis of the following:

- Descriptive factors such as age, race, and other demographics of the teacher, student, and school district in this study
- Media terminology used by media to describe teacher and/or student
- Media terminology used to portray the act and details of teacher sexual misconduct

This research project may promote a better overall understanding of the

media's influence in portraying sexual offenses against teenagers and children. This can be invaluable to private citizens, law enforcement, judicial officials, policy makers, public health professionals, directors, and educators who are charged with protecting children and with policy development. Identifying biased, stereotypical, and ambiguous language in news reports about teachers-student relationships and adolescent sexuality, plus addressing assumptions about male and female sexuality could eliminate some of the public's confusion surrounding these articles. Consistent and accurate terminology could be a key to accurately reporting these cases as sexual abuse and rape rather than by using terms such as "harassment," "sexual affairs," and "relationships."

In addition, this study will contribute to the social construction literature. In this theoretical perspective, criminal acts are socially constructed and include numerous viewpoints that differentiate according to the definition of sexual harassment and abuse, background of the case, legal restraints, and other factors. Most research on educator sexual misconduct relies on news reports. According to Sampert (2010:327), journalists are susceptible to the same distorted views, stereotypes, and misconceptions as the rest of society. Thus, the emphasis and analysis of language in news articles are paramount in understanding how viewers receive information and details about the participants and details surrounding educator sexual abuse cases in the media. In addition to social construction literature, this dissertation can also contribute to media studies literature in other disciplines.

This study allows us to better understand how teacher-student sexual cases have been framed and how they have captured the attention of the public, with the media as a driving force. Coming to this understanding can have significant policy implications in that it may impel efforts to address the problem. This is significant, since as harmful as educator sex abuse is, it has not been followed up with media coverage of positive consequences of abolishing this illegal sexual behavior. In fact, even though these cases are increasing, a collective effort from the public for policy changes has not materialized. When the problem is actually recognized as a harmful *social problem* and can no longer be ignored, an adequate challenge to the issue of teacher sex abuse will begin to formulate along with the emergence of advocacy groups.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject of teacher sexual misconduct in regards to media coverage spans a number of disciplines including the fields of education, journalism/communications, sociology, psychology, and criminology. Several themes begin to emerge when examining issues surrounding the issue of educator sexual abuse, including research deficiencies, authoritative boundary violations, media exploitation, gender stereotyping, and the impact of educator abuse. The first section of this chapter reviews literature concerning teacher sexual abuse, including the issue of boundary violations, the existence of media exploitation, the influence of gender and gender stereotypes, and the impact of educator abuse. The second section presents the theoretical framework. The final section outlines the research questions to be investigated.

LIMITED RESEARCH

Researchers who examine the issue of improper educator relationships often find that the research itself is problematic because of reporting issues, record-keeping shortcomings, and ethical issues of interviewing minors. One major reason for limited research has been the taboo nature of sexuality and sex between adults and children or teenagers. Another major reason for the inconsistency comes from the fact that there is no current federal data base that collects data on teacher sexual abuse of students. In fact, even though the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001 called for the development of a

national database, no such record-keeping or centralized system is in existence almost two decades later. In addition, Nielsen (2001:166) highlights another obstacle in sexual abuse research by raising concerns about the ethics involved in interviewing abused athletes or coaches that sexually pursue and abuse children.

Most research on teacher misconduct is journalistic in nature, coming from newspapers and news websites (Knoll 2010:372). In addition, newspapers and magazines also give widespread publicity to cases involving sexual abuse of athletes by coaches. Gervis and Dunn report that while news reports are commonplace, there is clearly a lack of literature that analyzes the nature of the illicit relationship between coaches and child athletes (2004:216). Brackenridge and Kirby (1997:2) point to a lack of acknowledgement of the problem of sexual abuse of student-athletes which has blocked adequate research studies and institutional response.

Traditional teacher-student sexual abuse research has focused on the issue of causality and has tended to be individualistic. Interest in causal factors appears to have increased during the 1990s, but it is not clear what factors caused the acceleration of research. Studies concerning sexual harassment in sport increased during the 1990s as well. However, Fasting and Brackenridge (2007:24) stressed that research is limited in the area of descriptions and characteristics of coaches who sexually harass and abuse athletes.

The tendency has been to neglect structural issues, such as the role of media, the influence of the media on public perception, and the impact of media bias based on gender, age, sexuality, and other attributes. Drew and Weaver (1990:740) point to the

disparity in research on the news media's role in contributing to public affairs knowledge versus the news media's role as entertainment. In this way, the competing motives of the media shape the choice of news stories to cover and affect the nature of this coverage as well. Bushman and Cantor (2003:130) blame ethical concerns for the lack of research, but reports that emerging research confirms that misperceptions about sexual violence and sexual callousness may indeed come from media influence. When it comes to the media's view of teacher-student sexual contact, Angelides (2009:23) points out that there is a "moral panic in the West" over the last 20 years over pedophilia which can be found daily from media sources. Vandiver and Kercher (2004) emphasize that very little research exists that examines the various aspects of teacher-student relationships, particularly those that study the impact of child sexual abuse by educators. Their specific study illustrates grooming patterns and potential warning signs of educator misconduct (2004:376). Since research is limited and since a majority of studies rely on news reports, consistency and fairness in the use of terminology, combined with the saturation of news, language, visual imagery, accuracy, and other attributes have an impact on academic discourse.

BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS

Authoritative boundary violations and misuse of power are at the heart of most if not all of these educator abuse cases. Even the famous Stanford prison experiment still raises questions concerning the circumstances surrounding the abuse of student "inmates" by their fellow student "guards." Whether it is a relationship between a teacher-student, guard-inmate, or therapist-patient, these stories raise serious concerns. Brackenridge and

Kirby (1997:2) argue that the idea of consent between a subordinate and a person in authority is problematic in these instances of ‘romantic relationships’ between two people.

The Texas Educator’s Code of Ethics (ECE) specifically addresses appropriate boundary issues and appropriate communications that both can serve to undermine the professionalism expected of educators. Thompson specifically points to the following sections as problematic in eliminating potential sexual abuse between students and school personnel (2013:58):

Section 3.8 – Maintaining professional boundaries based on reasonably prudent standards

Section 3.9 – Refraining from inappropriate texts, cell phone, email, social networking, and other electronic communication with students or minors

The ECE also addresses that communication between educator and students must only be in the capacity as a classroom teacher or as an extracurricular sponsor. Thompson highlights the dangers of personal cell phone calls and texting to minors by utilizing the example of a male teacher who sexually solicited a student by sending over 900 personal text messages. Clearly, with the advent of instant messaging, Twitter, and other forms of instantaneous and seemingly private communications, more research is a necessity in order to analyze and confront this issue. Literature on student-educator interactions can shed light on sexual immediacy and non-verbal communication that is often vague and ambiguous. Educational studies show that students’ perceptions of teachers often were dependent on communication and non-verbal clues. Lannutti, Laliker, and Hale (2001:69) illustrated findings that students often perceive their instructors who

touched them on the arm as more capable, more understanding, and friendly than those who did not touch them. In addition, Stepp (2001:36) points out that increased interaction with faculty increases the risks for sexual harassment for both males and females.

Studies on boundary violations in other professions closely parallel those in teacher sexual abuse research and provide insight into power differentials between authority figures and subjugated populations. For example, researchers in the U.S. and Australia focused on sexual misconduct between therapists and their patients. Wincze, Richards, Parsons, and Bailey (1996:293) found that even with well-educated professionals, the line of sexual consent by patients becomes blurred because of the therapist power differential. This imbalance of power between therapist and patient coupled with their intimate discussions both resulted in situations in which judgement was compromised, vulnerability was exploited, and the power of sexual consent was abused. More illustrations can be seen in a study of boundary violations by social workers. Strom-Gottfried (1999:439) found that most violations started out innocently as a result of blurred boundaries, but then culminated into inappropriate and criminal sexual contact.

The off-campus locations and after-school requirements of sports and extracurricular activities and the lack of direct supervision by parents or other adults add another dimension to the problem of boundary violations. Nielson (2001:177) explains that coaches serve as surrogate parents for young athletes during training sessions, travel, meals, and competitions and often discuss a broad range of intimate subjects with them, such as body shape, nutrition, sleep habits, injuries, menstruation, weight, muscles,

appearance, and other personal details. She also found the issue of body intimacy to be ironic in that most coaches thought it was appropriate to give hugs and massages to their athletes (177). Even though these actions are not criminal, they are listed among potential grooming techniques of child sexual predators.

MEDIA EXPLOITATION

Another significant theme that emerges from a review of media treatment of teacher sexual abuse deals with media exploitation either through the use of selection of particular stories, the utilization of vague or inflammatory language and visual imagery, and other characteristics. Few people would argue with the news mantra that 'sex sells' in the current media climate.

In his analysis of media trends in sex crime coverage, Dowler (2006:383) found that 10 percent of crime stories in media news are sex-related. News saturation distorts the issue of what type of people are sexual perpetrators. Miller, Hefner, and Leon (2014:63) found that print, broadcast, and Internet media outlets have been transfixed by sex crimes, while at the same time, they have conveyed certain characteristics and inaccuracies to shape public view and policies. Certainly, a case can be made that the media uses teacher sexual assault cases to interest the public, while the issue of preventative measures is completely ignored.

As Breen (2000:332) illustrates, news reports and agenda-setting influence public opinion and steer the public's approach to important issues. Sikes (2006:267) points to the year 1999 as the pivotal year for the increase in coverage, specifically because of the Woodhead Scandal in England. Its subsequent coverage shifted media attention and

altered the way reporters described teacher scandals. Rather than basic sexual crime stories, these teacher-student sex stories provided scandalous details in order to feed the insatiable appetite of the public. Cavanaugh is another leading researcher with expertise in media exploitation of cases for both heterosexual and homosexual teachers. Some of the most well-known cases that have been documented have been between adolescent students and a much older school employee, which she refers to as “intergenerational affairs” (Cavanaugh 2008:394).

More importantly, the sexual assault cases that attract attention are those which contain sensational or unusual distinctions. The bottom line is that racy headlines garner more readership, newspaper subscriptions, and advertising sponsors. Hence, the lurid stories of sex in classrooms between teachers and students give credibility to this finding. In some cases, the perpetrator of a sex crime is portrayed by the media in a sympathetic light as the “real” victim, while the young naïve student-victim is painted as a “vamp” (Dowler 2006:385).

It is important for researchers to better understand the ways in which the media may influence public discourse in terms of issues of culpability, gender, and criminality. Others have even gone so far as to suggest that news reports are used as a way to convey a particular theme or story (Cluckie, Rudd, and McKeivitt 2012:292). As an example, Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006:30) discuss the theme of the media ‘bad girl,’ which exposes the public to the lurid dark side of female criminality and aggressive behavior. According to Fasting and Brackenridge (2007:24), popular media reports that feature

stories of sexual harassment of female athletes often portray the male perpetrators as successful, highly regarded, and as “very nice” people.

News reporters, editors, and station directors certainly make intentional choices of which news stories to feature for front page coverage or lead newscasts. Headlines and specific terminology within the text are key components chosen deliberately to entice readers and become ingrained in the consciousness of the reader or viewer. In a study of a seven-year span of news reports of sex abuse cases, Breen noticed no use of the term ‘pedophile teacher,’ while the term ‘pedophile priest’ was used 332 times (2000:337). Another researcher recognized that purposefully using the term ‘sex assault’ instead of ‘sexual assault’ diminishes the assaultive or harmful nature and focuses the reader’s attention on the word ‘sex’ (Sampert 2010:305). In the past decade or so, there have been various examples of the misrepresentation of rape. Sampert (306) points to a story of a Calgary priest who had been convicted of a teenage boy’s sexual assault. Rather than use the term ‘rape,’ the articles referred to ‘fooling about.’ In another report, rather than utilize the term ‘sexual assault’ of a thirteen-year-old girl by an adult man, the press termed the incident as a case of a “wealthy playboy who picked up underage prostitutes for partying” (Sampert 2010:306).

Along with misleading and stereotypical terminology, the utilization of visual representation and imagery by media should be questioned as well. Breen (2000:336) illustrated a case in which a photo of an angry priest who lashed out at photographers during his sexual abuse trial was used frequently during any Catholic abuse coverage and the same photo was also overlaid with photos of children’s toys. This photo was

frequently used in random sex abuse stories and as a result, this one single Catholic priest then became the poster boy for all types of sex abuse cases. Viewers could make an assumption that their children were safe at home, but evil ‘strangers’ were lurking at every turn. Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995:50) also found that media focuses more on sexual abuse outside the home, by strangers and by school employees, rather than on sexual abusers in the family. As a comparison, flattering photos of Mary Kay Letourneau and Debra Lafave have also adorned various opening news segments that concern teacher sexual abuse.

GENDER AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

Finally, gender and gender stereotyping also play a pivotal role in media portrayals in various types of news sources. Some researchers find that there is an epidemic of media coverage that crosses over to the point of media manipulation and exploitation. Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006:33) point to the year 2002 for a media shift from feminine stereotypes to cover pages and articles featuring largely white, middle-class girls as aggressive and masculinized. This shift spills over into the area of media coverage of educator sexual abuse as well.

The issue of gender seemingly plays a role because even though 9-of-10 cases of school sex abuse involve male educators, news coverage sometimes is slanted towards the 10 percent of incidents perpetrated by female educators (Irvine and Tanner 2007:2). A U.K. study points out that 96 percent of teacher-offenders are male, are usually middle-aged, and have acted alone (Moulden, et al. 2010:406). However, media stories tend to

highlight and sensationalize cases that involve female teachers, with utilization of the stereotype that the adolescent male is somehow “less harmed” when the teacher is an older female (Fromuth, Holt, and Parker 2002:70). Nielsen (2001:169) questions whether girl-athletes are more likely to be abused than boy-athletes and reports the lack of reliable academic gender research on this question.

Sampert refers to the recent journalistic phenomenon of over-representation of the male victim-female perpetrator as a “novelty” that garners increased attention to the story (2010: 313). What if the roles were reversed and a middle-aged teacher has sexual intercourse with a 14-year-old girl in his class? The public outrage more than likely would be elevated and illuminates the double-standard with regards to gender. More importantly, misplaced fascination with female perpetrators by media and by many Americans both minimizes and trivializes the harm aimed at young male victims (Irvine and Tanner 2007:3). Rather than focusing on stopping educator sexual abuse, many news articles focus more on the sexual aspects and perpetrator attributes. As an illustration, only 4 percent of almost 2000 news items focused on prevention and education for the public (Kitzinger and Skidmore 1995:48).

Instead of portraying female offenders as rapists, the media teases the public with glamour-shots and salacious language in describing the personal lives and details involving attractive female teachers. In 2002, tabloid news organizations covered the Amy Gehring case and had a field day with daily updates about sex, virginity, and other assorted details. The *Daily Mail*, a mid-market British tabloid, interviewed the male victim who described how his teacher would report for school in “knee-high boots, tiny

leather skirts and tight tops – you can imagine the effect it had on the boys.” (Mouland 2016). Furthermore, Sutherland (2003) points to the infamous case of Mary Letourneau as a classic example of double-standard in news reporting. Even though Letourneau was given prison time for sexually abusing a 12-year old boy, news reports pointed to a perceived mental illness and depicted their illicit relationship as a case of “forbidden love” (Sutherland 2003:319). Use of bias in descriptive language and visual imagery is significant in news reports. Knoll (2010:372) reports that use of the term ‘cougar’ to describe a female perpetrator who victimizes an adolescent male certainly minimizes the harm and paints the illegal sexual acts as “harmless initiations.”

Morgenbesser (2010) furthers research by analyzing the use of gender stereotypes and notions of victimization. He reports that females viewed sexual abuse by male and female teachers in an equal manner as negative, while males tended to view sexual abuse of male students by female teachers less negatively compared to the sexual abuse of female students by male teachers (Morgenbesser 2010:369). Despite statistics that prove most sexual predators are males, members of the media often choose to give attention to cases involving young white female teachers who are attractive, thereby minimizing the harm to their young male victims (Schwyzer 2012:1).

The gender of the victim is certainly a factor in teacher sexual abuse cases, although here too, available research has limitations. Schwyzer (2011:2), a gender studies researcher, illustrates a case in which a female teacher faced discipline charges and harsh public scrutiny, while her male victim walked around like a “conquering hero” through the school hallways with the goal of impressing other guys. Analysis of newspaper

articles have shown how gender and a disorder such as ADHD interconnect and have an impact on public perception. For example, Horton-Salway highlighted the use of newsworthy narratives that depict the term ‘boys’ rather than the gender-neutral ‘children’ in articles concerning rebellion and criminal acts (2012:1090).

Research that looks at sexually abusive coaches illustrates the pattern of victim grooming that takes place over a long period of time. Female athletes are particularly vulnerable to the grooming process, which includes the building of trust and the peeling away of layers of boundaries via confusing verbal and non-verbal messages. Athletes who participate in a selection process of being carefully chosen from a long list of potential elite athletes can find themselves trapped and unable to make rational decisions to reject sexual overtones. Brackenridge and Kirby (1997:122) report that one female survivor described her mindset during her abuser’s grooming period with the following explanation:

I thought, ‘Wow’ when he said he’d coach me ... You don’t ask him to coach you, he selects you. You are somebody if you’re coached by him because he coaches the best people in the country no-one questions him.

IMPACT OF EDUCATOR ABUSE

Research on student victimization reveals a gap in efforts to expose the scope of this issue. Fromuth, Holt, and Parker (2002) highlighted an earlier study which revealed interesting statistics about sexual harassment in American schools. In her study, an estimated 18 percent of 8-11th graders reported that they had been sexually harassed by a teacher or school employee (Fromuth 2002:60). Sikes (2006:267) also reported that an

astounding 1 out of 5 British secondary students admitted to having consensual sex with a teacher. Many students do not recognize that they have been victimized because of the slow and deliberate grooming behavior of the perpetrators. Stepp (2001:36) points out the grooming process can include the utilization of jokes, sexual teasing, unwanted gestures, or looks as the beginning steps to sexual harassment. An official Canadian report warns that school staff should never ignore even “nontouching and verbal sexual harassment by school personnel” because of the potential harm to students and possible legal consequences for school districts (Burgess et al. 2010:396).

The body of research on teacher misconduct has been improved by the efforts of leading researcher Charol Shakeshaft. Her research focuses on the student victimization surrounding these cases. Oftentimes, communities rally around the popular teacher or coach, while ostracizing the victim (Shakeshaft and Cohan 1995:522). A huge majority of these cases are resolved by simply allowing the accused teacher to resign, leave, or retire. This practice is widely-known throughout educational circles as “passing the trash” (Shakeshaft and Cohan 1995:522). Media coverage, in these cases, would usually not provide a follow-up to inform the public because school districts quietly move the accused teacher along to a different district.

Celia Brackenridge is a leading researcher in sexual abuse in sports organizations. One of her contentions is that because sports teams become a substitute family for athletes, this therefore makes sexual harassment and abuse by the coach what she calls an act of ‘virtual incest’ (1997: 118). Parents turn over their children and adolescents to an

authority figure who has power and control over many aspects of the athletes' lives. Success depends on following the authority and being obedient and subservient followers of a trusted adult. According to Brackenridge (1997:122), severe consequences for the victim include social embarrassment, emotional turmoil, psychological scars, loss of self-esteem, and many other negative signs of trauma.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research about teacher sexual misconduct depends largely on journalistic sources. The first section presents the theoretical framework that provides the underpinning for this study. The second section outlines teacher sexual abuse as a social problem. The final section outlines the research questions to be investigated.

Social Construction of Reality

Our social world is continually constructed and deconstructed based on the meanings that we attach to our sense of reality. The social construction of reality is a theoretical framework utilized in the attempt to make sense of our ever-changing world. The concern is “not with why, but with what is constructed and how?” (Holstein and Gubrium 2008:5). The core theory centers around a single question: How does anything come to be presented and accepted as ‘real’? This perspective highlights the social processes that lead to institutionalized roles within society.

Hiebert (2014) condenses the basis for Berger and Luckman's *Three Phases of Social Construction of Reality* as follows:

- 1) Externalization – the process whereby individuals create their own worlds
- 2) Objectivation – the process whereby individuals see life as ordered with routine behaviors, a thickened world, moral justifications, and meanings embedded in language.

3) Internalization – the process whereby individuals learn institutional order and culture.

Berger and Luckman (1966:65) suggest that knowledge of social norms and behavior is the “sum total of ‘what everybody knows’ about a social world.” In other words, because we have beliefs and opinions about everyday life, we experience our world through our own operative and subjective lens. Society is a human product based on meanings, language, symbolism, and interpretations. Gergen (2000:237) concludes that constructionists maintain that individuals mentally construct their world from narratives developed in social relationships. The values and norms of society define the interpretations of individuals and groups within society. So, within the context of this dissertation and the use of social construction theory, what counts as ‘sexual misconduct’ depends on who is actually defining sexual misconduct. Some individuals look at the subject as an absolute criminal act and others see it as an inappropriate act, somehow excusable and private. Members of the general public may be horrified to read a news article depicting sexual violence and rape, while somehow not developing the same empathy and outrage for victims of teacher sexual abuse who have been repeatedly manipulated and coerced into sexual activity with an adult.

The social constructionist perspective explicitly examines the role of the media, including television, newspapers, documentaries, and online websites, in terms of presenting and shaping discourse toward illicit teacher student relationships. This discourse, as a result, has the potential to shape public opinion and policy. Constructionist research has demonstrated that the media has tremendous power and the ability to shape

public understanding of an issue and in effect, has the ability to shape whether the issue of teacher-student sexual abuse comes to be viewed as a serious and harmful issue. In order to be first to break news stories, shortcuts are often taken and a small and selective use of particular cases come to represent all of the sex abuse stories by media outlets. Lowney (2008:331) warns that media coverage of criminal acts has evolved into ‘good guy vs. bad guy’ antics with the goals of increased viewership, increased advertising money, and corporate revenue. Lowney also maintains that by choosing particular crimes to cover and by constructing victims in a particular manner, the audience is led to believe that “morally good people are greatly harmed through no fault of their own” (341).

Media reporting and discourse concerning issues of this sort are rarely impacted by social science research and thus are susceptible to trafficking in and reinforcing stereotypes about a multitude of topics including teachers, students, gender, and adolescent and cross-generational sexuality. Much of the attention to this subject has taken a journalistic approach and has focused on causality rather than social construction. At the core of the issue is how teacher-student sexual abuse is framed by the media. Do media reports perpetuate certain stereotypes when it comes to sexual actions, gender, age, attractiveness, and other attributes with use of colorful language, written text, and visual imagery within news stories involving educators and sexual conduct?

An example of media framing can be illustrated by observing photographs and jargon used in news articles. Mugshots used in news reports are a source of contention

among members of the judicial community. Janda (2015:1) reports that jail policy in Collin County, Texas requires a suspect to wear a towel around his or her neck in mugshot photos to ensure fairness in police lineups. This acknowledgement of the impact of visual imagery shows the danger of providing the public with a permanent representation of a potential suspect linked with a criminal accusation.

Social constructionism denotes that aspects in our world are not real unless we give them reality through our own unique experiences. Gergen (2000:121) points out that as individuals, we have each developed an internal system for evaluation and comprehension of the world around us. In particular, we cultivate a “systematic blindness” as a way to understand crime, odd behavior, prejudice, or other traumatic or fear-invoking events to promote a sense of social order. It is Gergen’s contention that bias and non-neutrality result from language that is colorful or from an “unpurified lens” (2000:75). If the media is the purveyor of our understanding of the world around us, this distortion of truth is passed through the power of the written word and through the visual imagery of crime photographs and videos.

Legal narratives are constructed and are also tainted by race, class, age, and gender and cannot be taken as absolute fact. Our legal system attempts to apply law evenly, but decision-making is influenced by society and the application of law is less precise than it pretends to be. Judges and lawyers are human and they are faced with the competing narratives presented by prosecutors and defense teams. Do we charge a teacher with a 6-year-old victim differently than a 17-year-old victim? Journalists are faced with interpreting these narratives in news articles.

Teacher Sexual Abuse as a Social Problem

Criminal acts are socially constructed and include numerous viewpoints that differentiate in terms of definition, background experience, and legal restraints. The viewpoints are also dependent on various perspectives which are based on individual micro-levels and institutional macro-levels. Maxwell (2010) points out that public policy problems are often easy to identify, but very difficult to resolve. From a social constructionist approach, teacher-student sexual abuse would be seen as a public problem, but the issue would be defined differently by policy actors. Stakeholders would push the issue through the stages of the public policy process below that lead to legislation and constructive changes (Maxwell 2010):

**Defining the problem → developing an agenda → formulating policy →
policy selection → policy implementation → policy evaluation**

A key component that is associated with the media's influence on public policy is this question: How does the issue eventually emerge as a social problem? If the media is so powerful and can frame the articles intentionally or unintentionally for their own benefit, what is the so-called 'tipping point' for teacher sexual abuse and how does it gain enough traction for parents, administrators, the public, law enforcement, and the judicial system to say "enough is enough"? While we are not tackling the problem of causality in this dissertation, we might find that the media could elicit positive changes simply in how the subject is framed by language, terminology, and symbolism. For example, Johnson points to photographs of police brutality in the South in the 1960s, which served as catalysts for public action and civil rights reform (2003:267). In the same vein, articles concerning horrific violence and child sexual abuse frequently elicit strong emotions,

while those with the component of non-violent sexual manipulation by adults in authoritative positions seemingly fail to adequately communicate the same degree of reprehensibility. Thus, outrage and calls-to-action fail to materialize.

Questions certainly arise as to whether relationships between female teachers and male students are portrayed differently than those involving male teachers. Sampert (2010:320) points to observations that stories often focus on appearance and dress of female perpetrators, while their male counterparts are described as “family men” as though good men do not commit sexual assault. These questions of gender, sexual stereotypes, and differing assumptions about female and male agency need much more serious investigation. Further, the framing of issues impact public discourse about emerging social problems and directly shape the focus and directions of public policy responses.

There has been a massive shift towards sensational news stories and talk shows in the U.S. With the advent of tabloid news and true-crime documentaries, crime and victimization began to take center stage. To add to this distinction, cable news outlets and the advent of instantaneous and breaking news, competition for viewers also drives the need for media to create interesting stories and headlines. Jenkins points out the importance of professional interests groups, specifically those who have a “claims-making role” in establishing margins with regards to sexual abuse by clergy and others in authoritative roles (2003:262).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since this project utilizes inductive methodology, I will begin with a loose set of

basic research questions, including the following:

- 1) How are the participants and case details portrayed and framed by the media and what aspects are specifically highlighted?
- 2) What patterns emerge in an analysis of terminology used in reporting teacher-student sexual abuse cases?
- 3) Does media coverage in regards to written text differ based on the general characteristics of the teacher, student, and/or school district?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the data and methodology used in this study. The first section describes the data. This is followed by a discussion of the sampling and the data source. The third section describes the instruments used. This is followed by a description of the data collection process. The fifth section contains a discussion of the data analysis process. This chapter concludes with a description of the coding process.

DATA

The data for this study come from 104 cases of teacher-student sexual misconduct in Texas during 2014. If available, three online news articles per teacher case will be examined. Data will be on basic demographics of the teacher, student, district, and news outlet. Data from the articles will also examine language and visual imagery used in each news story.

SAMPLE

While there were other cases in Texas in 2014, this specific data set is being utilized due to the availability of a previous study by Terry Abbott, president of *Drive West Communications*. Abbott's company, which is located in Houston, Texas, deals in media relations and has clients who belong to public education systems and organizations. They have been involved with compiling statistics and information about teacher misconduct cases in Texas and are one of few organizations to actively track cases.

As Oberg and Seibert (2014:4) found, Texas leads the nation in teacher sexual misconduct cases, so this is a key reason why I have chosen to focus on this particular Texas data set. Another reason for choosing to concentrate on 2014 is the likelihood that some of the offenders will have cycled through the legal process and the outcome and sentencing may be available in online news reports.

While Abbott shared his list of 111 individual school districts with accused teachers, he did not release the names of individual teachers. However, since these acts are criminal in nature and the accusations and arrests are reported by news outlets as matters of public record, a basic search on the Internet quickly revealed the individual names of accused teachers to match the specific school district. Of the 111 districts shared, I was able to narrow down names and remove duplicate items to the final number of 104 teachers from 80 total districts.

Once the individual names were located, an Internet search was conducted using the teacher name along with the words 'teacher misconduct.' If available from the individual teacher search, at least three articles per teacher were located and saved for examination, analysis, and coding. Internet sites were selected from both traditional and non-traditional online newspapers, online news websites, and television news websites. Convenience sampling was used because this study examines news articles which were available in a specific time period and will most likely be available within a general region in Texas.

It is important to note here that these news reports are not legal documents and are simply reports on the investigation and/or arrest. The outcome of guilt or innocence will

only be used if it is available through news websites. To maintain confidentiality, the identity of each teacher is coded and teacher names are not used in the findings. Students in news reports are victims of sexual abuse and are also minors, so student names were not reported by news sources and are not a part of this research.

INSTRUMENT

Mass media provides an unobtrusive view of data. In looking at previously published news reports, a close examination of texts will show contextual meanings and how language is utilized. Coding sheets are used to assist in coding data and to record systematic information about each of the selected sexual misconduct cases for analysis. As news articles are examined, demographic data surrounding each case is recorded first. Then, terminology surrounding the sexual aspects of the case are recorded. Language describing any sexual aspects of the case is then noted in order to compare the legal terms with slang or misleading terminology.

Charmaz (2008:50) suggests using a line-by-line coding approach, while others recommend a specific number of codes. Incident-to-incident coding is utilized for my comparison of articles concerning the same misconduct case among various articles (Charmaz 2008:53). My approach to coding includes a mixture of *in vivo coding*, which uses participants' own language; *descriptive coding*, which involves a summarization of the article, paragraph, or excerpt; and *attribute coding*, which explains which news medium is used and contains categories for characteristics such as age, gender, and professional capacity of the educator in each article (Charmaz 2008:56). A system of categories and patterns naturally develop during the coding process and a series of

memos containing ideas, underlying themes, terminology, and general characteristics of participants within the topic of teacher sexual abuse is written for evaluation.

DATA COLLECTION

As previously mentioned, teacher sexual misconduct research has had to rely on print, television, and online news reports because of the lack of federal or state databases. Consequently, news reports from 2014 teacher sex abuse cases were collected by Terry Abbott, of consulting firm *Drive West Communications*. These data consist of a list of Texas school districts that employed an educator, coach, extracurricular sponsor, or administrator involved in a sexual abuse case involving an adolescent victim. Based on the list of district names, research of online news sources from traditional newspapers and from television, radio, and online news reports was conducted in order to discover the name of the perpetrator and details about each case. Data collection focuses on at least three credible news articles to illustrate media terminology and how the participants and the sexual aspects are portrayed in news reports.

DATA ANALYSIS

Content Analysis

Macnamara (2005:2) points to a general definition of content analysis as “any research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within text.” Content analysis (CA) calls for the quantitative and deductive examination and categorization of messages and themes within written texts and often includes visual imagery. Data results emerge from the development of the themes and categories. Neuman refers to CA as “objective and systematic counting and

recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in a text” (2000:293). However, there are researchers who disagree that CA is strictly a quantitative measure. Macnamara (2005:3) mentions other leading scholars who debate the long-standing argument as to whether mass media creates public opinion or whether mass media simply reflects current culture.

Using the early ideas of Berelson, Macnamara (2005:3) provides a beneficial description of the five key purposes of content analysis:

- To describe substance characteristics of message content
- To describe form characteristics of message content
- To make inferences to producers of content
- To make inferences to audiences of content
- To predict the effects of content on audiences

By using the above list as a guide, my analysis of news articles leads me to the distinct possibility of inferences and assumptions about the participants in news cases of teacher sexual abuse and how the public is impacted by the participants’ portrayals by the media. According to Neuendorf (2004:34), while CA is not limited to simply analyzing words, it is limited to a focus on the message. So, while natural interpretation of intentional and unintentional journalistic messages will occur, the coding reliability during this process is essential because CA looks for consistency and stability of meaning (Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004:21).

Krippendorff points to a “problem-driven analysis that derives from a desire to know something currently inaccessible” (2004:342). This particular study seeks to analyze the real-world problem of sexual assault of students by teachers who are

entrusted with their care. An advantage of using qualitative content analysis is that categories can be extractive from the data and can be revised as themes evolve (Cho and Lee 2014:15). Another advantage in using this method of analysis can be seen in the capability of using both the inductive and deductive approaches for analysis. In keeping with the original research questions, the cases examine terminology, details, bias, and sensationalistic items within the news articles. Finally, rather than generating a theory, this study describes and evaluates media portrayal in educator misconduct articles and develops themes used by the media.

Discourse Analysis

Researchers have been quoted as saying that “social life in modern society is mediated by written texts” (Perakyla and Ruusuvuori 2011:529). Discourse analysis (DA) focuses on how a particular phenomenon is represented in written text, language, imagery, and symbolism (Krippendorf 2004:16). DA also elevates the importance of interpreted meaning and captures words, thoughts, body language, presentation, as well as other factors that maintain mental realities. Since language plays a significant role in perception, critical analysis of discourse is an ideal methodology. McIntyre, Francis, and Chapman (2011:2) point out that critical DA provides valuable insight into how bodies of knowledge are used to influence and impact public perception.

In addition, DA can illustrate how sexual and media power discourses intersect with American culture discourses. Crawford (2004:23) aptly points to the social and political aspects of western practices that view certain events and participants as legitimate, while delegitimizing others. According to Crawford, an example from western

society can be seen by the fact that “alchemists are derided and physicists are exalted” (2004:23). In comparison, how have the two views of American sexuality and professional educators changed and morphed into its current state based on the practice of media, television, and movie portrayal over the last several decades? In order to understand how practices change, Crawford points to five steps to be used by an analyst after a specific issue has been identified (2004:23):

- seek to identify the purpose to maintain or challenge a practice
- identify the specific pre-existing beliefs held by dominant actors
- trace the decision-making in historical/cultural context over a long period of time
- show why and how some beliefs were chosen and how they prevailed
- compare how the behaviors have become normative

Is the media complacent in its portrayal of individual cases of sexual abuse in our classrooms? If policymakers and school officials have the task of preventing educator sexual abuse, how has the use of vague and misleading terminology in media coverage impacted views and the possibility of a tipping point as a catalyst for corrective behavior? The discourse analysis examines these issues.

DA can include a dispositive analysis approach. Cluckie, Rudd, and McKeivitt (2012:292) used a dispositive analysis approach in their study that examined media reports. They found that newspapers and other news sources frequently deliver a particular type of message rather than simply reporting the facts of a news story to the public. Hopf (2004:32) gives an excellent analogy of how two phenomena, absences and anomalies, are such a critical part of DA by utilizing the following example:

If women never appear as engineers, race drivers, presidents, or prime ministers, this is evidence of how daily life is being socially constructed in a particular context.

If the norm is contextually framed by media outlets by depicting teachers, coaches, and extracurricular sponsors as inappropriate and unprofessional, it can result in a harmful stereotype of all educators. If those stereotypes are heightened and sensationalized, journalists are then engaging in the generalization of the men and women in the teaching profession as typically lustful after students and having no decent sense of boundaries regarding social friendships, familiarity, and sexuality. Thus, the absence of positive and respectful examples could have the capability and propensity for decreasing the status of the institution of education as a whole. As a result, my examination includes analysis of these omissions or outlier-cases if possible.

Mixed Methodology

Utilization of both content analysis and critical discourse analysis is the most justifiable process to examine how journalists frame participants and the details surrounding news stories about teacher-student sexual abuse. Researchers have been slow to utilize both methods, but dual methodology will allow for interpretation while also allowing for development of themes and categories during the coding process. While CA looks for consistency and stability, DA looks for change and flux (Hardy et al. 2004:20). According to Fierke (2004:37), CA works on the assumption that our world is fixed, while DA deals with periods of continuity and change.

Three examples illustrate how a mixed-methods approach to analysis can be an

ideal research option. A project by Karin Fierke (2004) used a mixture of both CA and DA to illustrate the background of the transition of disarmament and Cold War policies. As a result, Fierke could show how the issue and world view of global disarmament shifted from one phase to the unexpected next phase. A second example is seen from research conducted by Miller, Wiley, Fung, and Liang (1997). They recorded personal stories, using CA coding of recorded conversations, as a way to determine whether it was a viable medium of socialization within Chinese and American families. DA came in the form of in-home ethnographic fieldwork utilizing personal observations. Neuendorf (2004:35) describes a final example by using A.M. Smith's examination of the portrayal of women in film to show how CA can be used as a complementary tool for DA. While CA pointed to Smith's finding that gender among film producers and directors directly affected the film portrayal of women, researchers could definitely use DA for consequent studies that could see how and why this trend occurs and how it is framed (Neuendorf 2004:35).

The merging of both methods allows for a more comprehensive look at the issue of media portrayal. With a content analysis, I am examining news articles in order to analyze how teachers (perpetrators) and students (victims) are portrayed by the media. With discourse analysis, I am analyzing how and why this trend of coverage and terminology occurs and how the issue is framed by journalists. In addition, I am utilizing a multitude of variables, including media exploitation, gender, terminology, and others aspects of each case. Herrera and Braumoeller (2004:17) point out that it may be overly-simplistic to imply that CA is singularly formal and quantitative and DA is

inherently qualitative. A more useful and accurate philosophy may be to incorporate both by recognizing that overlap between the two can be a valuable tool in examining current media trends.

The goal of this dissertation is to draw specific conclusions concerning the role and impact of the media in its coverage of teacher-student misconduct based on how the players in each case are portrayed in news reports. This study also seeks to find evidence as to whether some news outlets may intentionally or unintentionally use written text with specific lexicon depending on the circumstances of the case. For example, is an illicit act referred to as a 'sex act' with the focus on sex, or is the behavior described with emphasize on the assaultive and criminal nature of the behavior with a student? Social scientists have held a fascination for instances of social deviance and from their research, these scientists have quite possibly influenced public opinion (Krippendorf 2004:57). Certainly, traditional mass communication studies show that favorable and unfavorable characteristics projected with the use of textual descriptions, symbolism, references, or stereotypes can dictate beliefs, convictions, and attitudes in the minds of authors, readers, or audiences (Krippendorf 2004:59).

By using mixed CA and DA methodology, I am utilizing both deductive and inductive reasoning. My basic premise works on the assumption that journalists and media outlets intentionally and unintentionally exploit the facts surrounding news reports of teacher misconduct. Therefore, my deductive examination tests this assumption as I go through each case described in several articles by either traditional or non-traditional news sources using content analysis. Cho and Lee (2014:15) suggest that the data

analysis process is advantageous because it allows an inductive approach to include the selection of units of analysis, open coding, the creation of categories, data coding, and then the revision of categories for final interpretation. An inductive approach to discourse analysis allows themes to develop in regards to the particular units of analysis that are significant. Data are collected and conceptual categories are developed by looking for trends that emerge from my particular data and observations.

While the research may measure word or phrase frequencies as a traditional quantitative study would entail, this research carefully quantifies demographical measurements such as gender of teacher and victim and whether or not perpetrator-teachers were also fulfilling a role as a coach or extracurricular sponsor. From textual analysis, various multiple narratives develop in terms of usage of legal jargon, slang terms, and discrepancies involving terminology. For example, it is interesting to see if each article's title actually matches the information provided within the article or if the journalist uses creative freedom in utilizing a specific title in order to catch the attention of the potential reader or viewer. In addition, the intersectionality of demographical categories, such as race, class, gender, age, teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and district size are examined to see which themes or patterns emerge.

It has long been held that since viewership, ratings, and sponsorship often guide stations and newspapers as to what stories are reported and how they are framed, news outlets are frequently assumed to be agenda-driven. The news articles chosen for analysis in each teacher-student case serve as narratives and as storytelling activities, while the actors (teacher, student, principal, police spokesperson, etc.) serve to fill in fragments of

the story based on the writer's own interpretation. While content analysis and discourse analysis are both concerned with examining social reality and analysis of texts, both types of methodology have distinct factors which can be useful in understanding differentiated communication.

CODING

Demographic information on each of the 104 teachers in Abbott's 2014 study are recorded using the initials of the gender followed by a numerical assignment for confidentiality. No identifying information is reported. The first male teacher is referred to as Teacher M1 up to the last male as Teacher M71. The first female teacher is assigned the code of Teacher F1 up to the last female as Teacher F33. The document for this analysis is called a *Teacher Demographic Coding Sheet* and it also contains demographic information on the school district, school, and student involved in the case. *Teacher Demographic Coding Sheets* are strictly for recording purposes for analysis and are not shared or published in order to protect the privacy of those individuals under investigation. Students' names are never used nor are they recorded because of newspaper privacy policies. Each *Teacher Article Coding Sheet* contains coding information based on three separate news articles from a wide variety of news sources for document analysis. If possible, there is an attempt to find a mixture of articles from traditional local newspapers and from non-traditional online sources, and from national or international sources as well. Otherwise, especially with cases that are not well publicized, any available online news sources are examined and analyzed.

Codes are based on open-ended terms, phrases, and article titles of each individual teacher case. The *Teacher Article Coding Sheets* are utilized to record the emerging data for thematic analysis. Once the coding process is under way with all three articles per teacher, terminology is compared with the texts previously recorded as a way to compare and attain consistency. A list of descriptive language is the final goal for analysis and is provided in Chapter 4. Gibbs and Taylor (2005) referred to this common method as 'constant coding,' which is a highly recommended coding procedure. Finally, the themes are indexed into categories that make for open-minded and reliable analysis. This process enables each of the research questions to be addressed.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings from the analysis. The first section provides demographic information on the teachers and students who were involved in these cases. The second section reports the analysis of the news reports that focus on terminology used in article titles and the articles themselves. Also included is a discussion of the scope of journalistic coverage and news reports. Finally, the original research questions about media portrayal of teacher misconduct will be addressed.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics provided from the articles for individual teachers, victims, and school districts better illustrate the features of the 104 cases. Information about teachers and victims are pulled from the 308 news reports from online newspapers and television online news sources. Categorical information is further dissected to include observations concerning factors such as gender, race, age, grade level, professional capacity, and district size. The goal is to include descriptive statistics as a quantitative base along with the content analysis that follows.

A total of 104 teachers in Texas were alleged to have had illicit sexual relationships with students in 2014. These cases range from inappropriate comments and texts to aggravated sexual assault. The list below provides a general spectrum of demographic information embedded within the 308 news articles (see Appendix A). Teachers are not identified by name and have been assigned a numerical code based on gender. For example, male teachers in the data set were coded as “M1” to “M71” and female teachers were coded as “F1” to “F33.”

Teacher Gender

Further division illustrates the breakdown of cases by gender (see Table 1). As shown, the majority of teachers are male (68 percent), more than double the number of females (32 percent). This information is utilized to measure whether gender plays a role in news coverage and within language and terminology within the news articles. Males are over-represented in this study. For comparison, numbers in this study are quite different for the teacher population in the state. The Texas Education Agency reports that male teachers represent 23 percent of the total as compared to 77 percent for female teachers in Texas during the 2013-2014 school year (Ramsay 2016).

Table 1. Gender of Teacher

Gender	N	%
Male	71	68%
Female	33	32%
Total	104	100%

Teacher Race

There are three racial and ethnic categories represented in this study: Whites, Hispanics, and African-Americans (see Table 2). When race is considered, the majority of teachers are found to be White (63 percent), almost twice the number of the other races combined. The findings here closely resemble Texas demographics. The Texas Education Agency reports show that 62 percent of teachers in Texas are white, 25% percent are Hispanic, and 10 percent are African-American, according to 2013-2014 TEA figures (Ramsay 2016).

Table 2. Race of Teacher

Race	N	%
White	66	63%
Hispanic	29	28%
African-American	9	9%
Total	104	100%

Teacher Race by Gender

The significance of race and gender may play a factor in media coverage of teacher sexual misconduct. Using a two-way contingency table using teacher Race and Gender helps to advance the analysis (see Table 3). As noted, White males, White females, and Hispanic males made up a bulk of this investigation with a combined total of 89 percent compared to only 11 percent combined total for Hispanic females, African-American males, and African-American females. Figures are not available from TEA for Race and Gender combined.

Table 3. Race and Gender of Teacher

Race/Gender	N	%
White Male	37	36%
White Female	29	28%
Hispanic Male	26	25%
Hispanic Female	3	2%
African-American Male	8	8%
African-American Female	1	1%
Total	104	100%

Teacher Age by Gender

Age of teacher is a possible factor in sexual misconduct coverage in online newspaper and television news reports (see Table 4). The teachers in the 2014 data set are an average of 38.3 years old for males and 33.4 years old for females. The total average for all teachers equals 35.9 years. Allowing for both gender categories, teacher ages range from 18 years to 66 years.

Table 4. Teacher Age by Gender (Years)

	Male	Female
Average Age	38.3	33.4
Range	18-66	20-50

Teacher Employment Status

A major aspect surrounding the details of teacher misconduct involves the relevance of a teacher's employment position to his or her relationship with school children. In looking at whether media coverage varies among teachers depending on their employment capacity, it is important to distinguish the teacher's role and duties as it influences his or her access to students. These categories include: Teacher, Counselor, Teacher's Aide, Substitute Teacher, Sports Trainer, and Administrator (see Table 5). In this study, school administrator is defined as a school principal, a school district administrator, a superintendent, and a school board member. A significant majority (81 percent) are designated as classroom teachers with daily access to students. When teacher aides and substitute teachers, also with direct contact with students, are factored in, the total increases to 92 percent.

Table 5. Teacher Position of Employment

Position	N	%
Teacher	84	81%
Counselor	1	1%
Teacher's Aide	7	7%
Substitute Teacher	4	4%
Sports Trainer	3	2%
Administrator	5	5%
Total	104	100%

Teacher Level of School Assignment

A general assumption examined in the content analysis is that most of

the teacher misconduct news coverage, especially those with sensational details, involves high school teachers with teenage victims. To analyze this as a possible factor, the assignment level is indicated below with the following categories: Elementary, Middle School/Jr. High School, Senior High School, District Administration, and Unknown or Multi-Level if the assignment level was unclear (see Table 6). A total of 62 percent of the teachers are assigned to senior high schools. A senior high school is defined as a secondary school containing grades 9-12. If Middle School/Jr. High levels are factored in, 75 percent of all teachers are assigned to students at the secondary levels. At secondary locations, these teachers have daily interaction with and the responsibility to care for teenaged students, rather than pre-pubescent students.

Table 6. Grade Level of Teacher

Assignment Level	N	%
Elementary	12	12%
Middle School/Jr. High	14	13%
Senior High	64	62%
District Administration	2	1%
Unknown or All-Level	12	12%
Total	104	100%

School Assignment by Teacher Gender

School level can be further divided and can be seen in a two-way contingency table containing the following descriptive factors: Assignment Level and Gender (see Table 7). Teachers facing sexual misconduct allegations during the observation period at the Elementary level are three times more likely to be a male teacher (75 percent) rather than female (25 percent). At the Middle School/Jr. High School level, the teacher is two times more likely to be a male teacher. Finally, the largest group, High School teachers are more than twice as likely to be male (69 percent) than female (31 percent).

Table 7. School Assignment by Gender of Teacher

Elementary Level/Gender	N	%
Elementary Male	9	75%
Elementary Female	3	25%
M.S./Jr. High Male	9	64%
M.S./Jr. High Female	5	36%
High School Male	44	69%
High School Female	20	31%
District Admin. Male	2	100%
District Admin. Female	0	0%
Unknown	12	N/A
Total	104	--

Extracurricular Involvement

Is there a connection between sexual misconduct allegations and extra-curricular assignment levels? If so, are these details a source of specific news coverage? A substantial number of the 104 teachers are found to have extracurricular duties in addition to their teaching assignments (see Table 8). Results show that 44 of the 104 teachers (42 percent) have an assignment found in one of the following categories: Coach/Trainer/Cheer Squad, Music Director, Drama Teacher, ROTC Instructor, or UIL Academic/Club Sponsor.

Extracurricular duties require teachers to spend time after school, evenings, and weekends with students, and frequently, these activities occur when both teachers and students are without supervision by other school personnel, other adults, or by parents of the student participating in activities outside of the school day. Extracurricular duties also require sponsors to have access to students via texts, emails, and social media in order to relay important information. News reports may tend to focus on these cases and/or use specific language in describing the perpetrators of illicit sexual activity. For example, the perpetrator is often described as a “male” in the majority of sexual assault cases. However, in cases of teacher-student assaults, titles of articles will be examined to see

whether the perpetrators are specifically described as “teacher” or “coach” rather than by other descriptive labels.

Table 8. Extracurricular Duties of Teacher

Extra Duty Assignment	N	%
Coach/Trainer/Cheer Squad	30	68%
Music Director (Band/Choir)	6	14%
Drama Teacher	2	4.5%
ROTC Instructor	2	4.5%
UIL Academic/Club Sponsor	2	4.5%
Agricultural Sponsor	2	4.5%
Total	44	100%

Victim Characteristics

Among the 104 teachers, over 120 students were alleged to be sexually victimized by their adult school supervisors (see APPENDIX B). It is important to analyze descriptive statistics that focus both on teachers as well as the student-victims of sexual assault. Since news outlets are required to protect the identities of both minors and victims of sexual assault, it is difficult in some cases to establish an exact number of victims per teacher. In instances in which the number is unclear or still under investigation, the victims are coded as “1+” in numerical value. These numbers may assist in establishing motives as to why some sexual misconduct allegations are covered by the media, while others are virtually ignored. Victim characteristics, gender and age, in this study are found to be mitigating factors.

Cases which consist of a teacher and a single known victim, 81 of the 104 (78 percent), are clearly the norm in this study (see Table 9). Cases with two known victims are more rare (11 percent). With the first two categories combined, they encompass 89 percent of these cases and could possibly contradict the assumption that teachers in this study can be described as serial predators who often go undetected. However, as we also know, traditionally many sexual assault cases continue to go unreported. This particular

data set contained six teachers who have multiple victims or an unknown number of victims. An example of someone in this category, Teacher M70, is a male tutor who was accused of exposing himself and committing lewd behavior in front of entire class of male and female students.

Table 9. Total Number of Victims per Teacher

Number of Victims	Per Teacher	%
Single Victim	81	78%
Two Victims	11	11%
Three Victims	6	5.5%
Multiple or Unknown	6	5.5%
Total	104	100%

Victim Gender

The gendered nature of sexual assault is a potential factor in conjunction with how members of the media treat the details surrounding teacher sexual misconduct cases (see Table 10). Even though there are more male teachers than females in the study, 68 percent male compared to 32 percent, the gender of victims show a much closer set of figures. Of the more than 120 known victims of sexual allegations with identifiable gender pulled from news articles, 48 (40 percent) are male students and 62 (52 percent) are female students. If gender is unclear or not stated in news reports, the case is placed in the category marked as Unknown/Multiple victims.

Table 10. Victim by Gender

Gender	N	%
Male	48	40%
Female	62	52%
Unknown/Multiple	10	8%
Total	120+	100%

Victim by School Level and Gender

Categories for Victim School Level are as follows: Elementary, Middle School/Jr.

High School, Senior High School and Unknown/Multiple Victims. These distinctions are then crossed according to Gender in the contingency table below (see Table 11). In this data set, Elementary School females (91 percent) are more likely to be sexually abused than their male counterparts (9 percent) On the other hand, Middle School/Jr. High School males (73 percent) are more likely to be victims than females (27 percent). Finally, in known cases of High School student-victims, the results are more similar to Elementary findings: Females make up the largest total with 42 female victims (58 percent) as compared to their male counterparts with 30 (42 percent). Finally, when all secondary levels are combined, Middle School/Jr. High Schools and Senior High Schools, this accounts for 38 male victims compared to 45 female victims.

Table 11. Victim by School Level and Gender

School Level/Gender	N	% Within Level
Elementary Male	1	9%
Elementary Female	10	91%
M.S./Jr. High Male	8	73%
M.S./Jr. High Female	3	27%
High School Male	30	42%
High School Female	42	58%
Unknown/Multiple Victims	10+	N/A

Teacher and Victim by Gender

The following contingency table for Teacher and Victim by Gender illustrates the gender for both the teacher and the victim for analysis of both opposite-sex and same-sex victimization. (see Table 12). The category for Male Teacher-Female Victim contains the highest number among cases with 54 (52 percent), while Female Teacher-Male Victim follows with 29 (28 percent) when the gender of victim was known. Of the 104 cases, same-sex victimization appears significantly lower with totals of 12 (12 percent) for Male-Male victimization and 3 (2 percent) for Female-Female victimization. No evidence is found to state whether journalists and news directors sensationalize certain

types of sexual victimization by gender of teacher in conjunction with gender of victim within our 104 reports of teacher sexual abuse. In fact, there are more articles available at the local, national, and international levels for teacher misconduct when the teacher and student are of opposite gender.

Table 12. Teacher and Victim by Gender

Teacher (T) - Victim (V) Gender	Number of Cases	%
Male T - Female V	54	52%
Male T - Male V	12	12%
Female T - Male V	29	28%
Female T - Female V	3	2%
Unknown/Multiple Victims	6	6%
Total	104	100%

Victim Age

Finally, the age of a victim may shed light on a perceived notion of unbalanced media coverage of regarding certain types of misconduct cases in newspapers and in online news articles. The average age for male student-victims in this study is 15.6 years old, while the average age for females is 13.8 years old (see Table 13). The frequency distribution shows that the modal age among students of both sexes is 16 years old. In addition, the age-range among all victims is from 5 to 19 years old.

Table 13. Victim Age (Years)

Age Characteristic	Male	Female
Average Age	15.6	13.8
Age Range	10-19	5-18
Age Frequency	16	16

District Demographics

An examination of school districts concludes the demographic section analysis. This information provides insight into the size and type of the school district. The comprehensive list (see APPENDIX C) contains the names of school districts and

private/charter schools that faced allegations of teacher sexual misconduct in Texas in 2014. As a reminder, this list does not contain every single allegation across the state, but rather it contains those school districts and private/charter schools provided from a previous study by educational consultant, Terry Abbott. This list contains 74 school districts and 6 designated private/charter schools. Each entry contains the District Name, Community Type, and District Size, all of which are defined by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). For the purposes of this study, total numbers originated from a TEA snapshot of data according to 2014 figures.

Community Types are designated by county population, location, and economically disadvantaged enrollment into the following categories: Major Urban, Major Suburban, Other Central City, Other Central City Suburban, Independent Town, Non-Metropolitan: Fast Growing, Non-Metropolitan: Stable, and Rural. Private schools and charter schools are not included in these categories because their enrollment figures are not available and are not under TEA guidelines. More detailed information as to each Community Type category is found at the following TEA website address:

<http://tea.texas.gov/acctres/analyze/1314/level.html>

District Size denotes the numerical totals for student enrollment in 2014. Size of school districts in Texas range from rural districts with an enrollment of 500 students to major urban and suburban areas with more than 25,000 students. More detailed information as to each District Size category can be found at the following TEA website address: <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/snapshot/2014/distsize.html>.

School District by Community Type

Are larger school districts more prone to teacher misconduct allegations? Or, do large-market media outlets provide more access and widespread coverage of these stories? Major Urban districts account for 7 (10 percent) of the total cases (see Table 14). On the other hand, at the end of the spectrum of size are 12 Rural districts that account for 16 percent of the district totals. Four categories (Major Suburban, Other Central City, Other Central City Suburban, and Rural) are fairly even in terms of numbers across the state of Texas among Community Types with teacher sexual misconduct allegations. For example, Ropes ISD consists of less than 500 students according to TEA figures as compared to the largest Texas district, Houston ISD with 215,000 students. So, the argument can be made that allegations, charges, and criminal convictions for sexual abuse among teachers is an issue that does not only challenge larger school districts. It is a serious issue that also plagues school districts of every size across the state of Texas.

Table 14. School District by Community Type

Community Type	N	%
Major Urban	7	10%
Major Suburban	18	24%
Other Central City	14	19%
Other Central City Suburban	14	19%
Independent Town	3	4%
Non-Metro: Fast Growing	1	1%
Non-Metro: Stable	5	7%
Rural	12	16%
Total	74	100%

ANALYSIS OF NEWS ARTICLES

As each news article is analyzed and as similar patterns are coded, multiple narratives developed as to gender, race, age, teaching assignments, victimology,

district characteristics, journalistic perspectives and terminology, and the various aspects of teacher sexual assault. Through an awareness of intersectionality of gender, race, criminality, and media representation, it is apparent the subject of sexual assault by educators may be covered by media in a particular way as compared with other types of sexual assaults. From the previous review of literature, it was shown that journalists and news directors frequently take certain liberties in developing language and terminology to entice readership. Central to this viewpoint is Sampert's argument that calling these acts "sex" assault rather than "sexual" assault is a deliberate lexical choice by journalists and staff that work to trivialize or minimize the assaultive nature of sexual assault to a "sex attack" (Sampert 2010: 305).

Newspaper or Online News Types

In the current age of news reporting, many people receive their daily news with a click of a button in the form of online stories and headline news. Competition among news outlets requires quick reporting methods and catchy headlines with sometimes salacious details in order to grab a reader's attention. As the articles were examined, the following well-known adage, "If It Bleeds, It Leads," came to mind. Both the article title and the body of the report were instrumental in this segment of analysis.

In my analysis of article titles, I found that both local newspapers and television news stations and larger news markets appear to equally and frequently utilize language that describes the teacher's behavior as a sexual activity rather than as a criminal assault. Therefore, sensationalism and the use of salacious details appear to no longer be limited large metropolitan area, national, or world news outlets. In this study, smaller hometown newspapers in rural areas were to be found to just as likely to use misleading terminology in both headline selection and descriptive textual language. For example, the case of Teacher F2 takes place in Denison ISD, which has less than 5000

total students. All three local television news stations from the surrounding areas of Sherman and Denison use terminology that describe the female teacher's illicit acts to include the words "encounter," "liaison," "having sex," "committing adultery," and having a "sex tape." Another example from a smaller news market involves Teacher F30 in Floydada ISD, which has less than 999 total students. Her case is covered in two small-market newspapers which report that after being accused of "sexual misconduct," Teacher F30 admitted to being in a "relationship" that just "sprang up." Only one reference uses the term "sexual assault" in articles from both small-town news sources. The victim of Teacher F30 is a teenage male student.

Almost all articles in this study are taken from either online newspapers and from news outlets in large-size markets or by smaller regional or rural news outlets. However, there are at least 15 cases (14 percent) of the 104 teachers that are also covered by national or world news outlets. Some examples of these types of news outlets include *The Huffington Post* and *The Daily Mail (U.K.)*. It is significant to note that of these 15 cases, 13 (87 percent) involve a female teacher and a teenage male student. These 13 cases covered by national and world press all involve a "seduction" type storyline that includes an older white female teacher and a teenage boy. For example, news reports of Teacher F20 explain how authorities identified her by her distinct tattoo on her lower back from a video the pair recorded during sexual contact. This case is typical of those not presented as harmful sexual assaults, but rather as those with two perceived "willing" participants. Teacher F20 later appeared on *The Dr. Phil Show* to discuss her outrage that the victim had shared their intimate video with his friends.

Only 2 (13 percent) cases that are also covered by national or international news outlets involve a male teacher and a teenage female student. In the two stories, both involving an older male teacher and an underage female student, details are very

unusual. The first, Teacher M43, offered a 16-year old female student better grades for sexual favors and for keeping the relationship secret from everyone, including the teacher's wife who worked at the same school. In the second case, Teacher M57 walked brazenly in public with a 16-year old female student as if they were boyfriend-girlfriend and the two were seen by witnesses feeding each other as if on a romantic date. Gender of both the educator and the student appears to have a significant impact as to whether a case from Texas is picked up by a national, world, or entertainment-type news outlet. Female teacher cases involving a teenage male victim seem to garner much more media attention than their male counterparts.

Age plays a role in the majority of cases. Of these 15 cases covered by national or international news outlets, 11 (73 percent) involve a teacher who is 30 years of age or older. Another factor shows that all of these cases involve teenage victims, 13 (87 percent) male victims and 2 (13 percent) female victims. Findings show that there is a higher likelihood of national or international coverage when the teacher is in his or her thirties and when the victim is a teenager.

When race is considered, 11 of the 13 (85 percent) are White female teachers, while both male cases (100 percent) involve white male teachers. Only 2 teachers (13 percent) in our study of the 15 who received national or international coverage are non-White. This finding is significant when you consider that a much larger number of teachers in our study, 38 (37 percent) were non-White. To conclude, the demographics of gender, age, and race significantly impact whether a local Texas case is covered in a larger media market in the United States or abroad.

Terminology in Title of Article

Findings from 308 headlines show that 100 percent of the 308 article titles in the study include the employment assignment or school position of the educator. Examples

are as follows: Teacher, Coach, Superintendent, Substitute Teacher, Teacher's Aide, Athletic Trainer, Band Director, and Board Member. This is significant in comparison to other news reports on sexual assaults which usually do not identify the perpetrator's job title in the headline. In conducting this particular research, it is interesting to discover that *The Huffington Post* now features a specialized section touting racy headline stories of 'Teacher Sexual Misconduct.'

Sampert's emphasis on the importance of title or headline selection serves as a guide in the examination of words such as "sex attacks" rather the "sexual assaults" (2010: 305). Her argument appears to be correct: Journalists and news editors in this study make deliberate choices to use specific enticing and titillating language. Titles include language which alludes to the teacher being charged with having a "romantic relationship" even though the actual correct legal terms for the charges in most cases are either Indecency With a Child or Improper or Relationship Between Educator and Student, depending on the age of the victim. Of course, the use of these two appropriate and accurate headlines would not particularly entice a reader as those with titles that contain such provocative phrases. Some examples of headlines feature terms such as "performing oral sex," "having sex with a male cheerleader," and "lap dance in class." Teacher M7 was convicted of producing child pornography after posing as a young girl online to entice males to send nude photos. Two of his articles have headlines that imply that he faced "porn" charges. This example illustrates Sampert's claim that certain words minimize the seriousness of the allegations and possible legal ramifications of a sexual crime. The word "porn" often prompts a stereotypical thought of a sexually explicit magazine or an x-rated film, both legal when possessed by adults. However, the case of Teacher M7 involved enticing young men by posing as a girl in order to receive nude

images to be used for pornography. These serious and illegal actions resulted in a 60-year federal prison term for the former teacher.

The use of the word “sex” instead of “sexual assault” or “sexual behavior” can have an impact on perceptions of the seriousness of this behavior that plagues our schools. The following are useful examples as to how article titles may not tell the whole story and may intentionally or unintentionally influence public opinion. Teacher M61 was a high school administrator who was sentenced to 15 days in jail, placed on 10 years of probation, had his teaching certificate revoked, and paid a fine for Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student. Yet the titles of two of the three articles covering his case contain the phrases “arrested for sex with student” and “charged with having sex.” Teacher F28 was a high school teacher charged with Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student with a male student, yet her articles’ titles include the words “alleged affair” and “had sex” with a student. Teacher F26 was a middle school female teacher who was sentenced to probation after pleading guilty to Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student. Teacher F26 made contact with a male student’s genitals with her buttocks as well as placed her head between his knees as he sat in a chair in front of a classroom full of middle school students. Not one of the Teacher F26 articles mentions the correct charge or indecency of her behavior. Instead, all three article titles include the words “lap dance” or “birthday lap dance.”

The occurrence of misleading titles is found to be an interesting phenomenon. An analysis of article titles provides information on misleading titles with sexual terminology that fails to match the legal charge mentioned within the article. Of those 308 titles, almost half, 132 (43 percent), are found to contain language to describe sexual behavior that does not match the language of the correct legal term. For example, one case involves a “sexual assault” yet that wording is never used in a title. Instead,

the author or news director chooses the sensational word “threesome” to describe a sexual assault of two 15-year old girls by their teacher. Only a small number of new reports contain an explanation of the criminal implications in a way that would help the average reader understand the legal charge and impact facing the accused educator. For example, one article concerning Teacher M42 actually explains that Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student is a relatively new charge and is a third degree felony. But, generally as a rule, most articles leave the reader with a muddled view of the seriousness of the charge and therefore with a confusing perception of the impact of teacher sexual abuse.

Does gender of the teacher have an impact on the discrepancies between the article title and the legal term of the actual charge? Sampert (2010:313) points to a Canadian study which found that while 15 percent of sexual assault victims were male, newspapers published sexual assault stories with 28.5 percent of the victims being male. As a reminder, there are more male teachers than female teachers in this study. To be specific, there are 71 (68 percent) males to 33 (32 percent) females. However, in examining article titles, a more similar number is found among the 132 articles that have misleading titles. Of the 132 titles that do not match the legal charge, 72 titles (55 percent) involve male teachers as compared to 60 titles (45 percent) involving females. In looking at these findings, we are able to generalize that female teachers are portrayed differently than male teachers by sexualized terminology in article titles designed to capture a potential reader’s attention.

Terminology Used in News Article

Analysis of terminology is centered on media usage of words depicting the sexual nature in cases involving the 104 teachers in the study. Two cases illustrate how a typical news reader might interpret the details of the case. Teacher M45, a male elementary

teacher, sexually assaulted two 9-year old female students and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. In describing his actions, news reports discuss “grooming” that progressed to “inappropriate touching” that culminated in charges of Indecency With a Child. To compare, Teacher M57, a male high school teacher, also sexually assaulted a student, a 16-year old female, and was fired pending criminal charges for Indecency with a Child and Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student. But, rather than reporting that he assaulted a student, news reports describe M57’s behavior as “dating,” “romance,” and “feeding each other” in a restaurant. Coverage of Teacher M57 provides a good example of a story alternating between his portrayal as a good teacher while being presented as a sexual criminal complete with alternate intertwined sexual terminology. The authors of all three of his articles intermittently alternate from describing his criminal behavior, to then referring to the teacher-victim relationship as being a pair of “lovebirds” and describing the teacher as “well-liked” and “popular.” Age and gender seem to be a factor in cases such as this one. When elementary-age students are victimized, journalists are likely to include words such as “grooming” and “indecency.” On the other hand, when high school students are victimized, the cases lessen the assaultive nature of the sexual contact even though a high school student cannot legally consent to sexual contact with an authority figure.

Readers face a barrage of misleading terms to describe the behavior and criminal charges involved in these cases. Journalists often intertwine terms such as “molesting” and “inappropriate touching” with “rape” and “sexual assault.” Below is a comprehensive list (see Table 15) to show common examples from all 308 articles of phrases and textual language that compares legal terminology with journalistic terminology used in the news articles. The terms are in no particular order and are a way to provide insight into the

issue of misleading or inaccurate descriptive language found in typical news coverage of teacher sexual misconduct.

Table 15. Legal Terminology versus Misleading Terminology in Articles

Legal Terminology	Sexual Terminology
Aggravated Sexual Assault of a Child	Having Sex
Child Pornography	Porn Charge
Display of Harmful Material to a Minor	Repeated Sex
Improper Relationship B/W Educator and Student	Sex Crime
Indecency With a Child by Exposure	Sex Case
Indecency With a Child by Sexual Contact	Inappropriate Touching
Indecency With a Child	Sex Charges
Injury to a Child	Sex Scandal
Production of Child Pornography	Sexting
Sexual Assault of a Child	Rape
Sexual Performance of a Child	Child Sex Charges
Solicitation of a Minor for Sexual Contact	Abusing Students

Inaccurate Terminology

Salacious details seem to be the norm for descriptions of teachers and teacher behavior that are chosen by journalists either from observation or through the use of court documents surrounding each case. The result is seen in language that has the capability to show this behavior as lecherous and predatory in nature or in portraying the behavior as normal romantic activity. In addition, in the examination of phrases used to describe these illicit relationships in many of these cases develop into an interesting pattern. The phrases create the incorrect image that these teacher-student pairings are somehow appropriate in cases in which the teacher is a secondary teacher or if the student is portrayed as a perceived “willing” participant. Inflammatory phrases used to describe teachers, their sexual behavior, and their illegal relationships are found in Table 16 below. Again, the phrases are in no particular order or pairing, but provide examples as to the wide of misguided or inaccurate terminology found in almost every teacher case.

Table 16. Description of Teacher/Behavior and Illicit Relationships

Terminology For Teacher/Behavior	Terminology For Relationship
Randy Texas Band Teacher	Liaison
Popular	Affair
Well-Liked	Sexual Relationship
Very Affectionate	Rendezvous
Friend to Students	Friends with Benefits
Awesome	In Love
Fun	Unwanted Attention
Award-Winning Great Teacher	Dating
Crossed Ethical Boundary	Threesome
Sexual Predator	Tryst
Pedophile	Consensual Relationship
Creepy Substitute Teacher	Love Affair
Promised to Leave Wife	Adultery
Groomed and Manipulated Victim	Boyfriend/Girlfriend
Gave Victim a Big Reward	Infidelity
Serial Predator	Romantic Relationship
Dangerous Sexual Propensities	Inappropriate Relationship
Married Mother of Four	Sex All Summer Long
Husband is a Police Officer	Fantasy
Gave \$5.00 and a Bag of Chips	Romantic Sparks

Terminology for Teacher Sexual Activity

Narratives used to describe the specific sexual acts are found to contain a long list of examples that are in direct conflict with the correct charge of Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student, Indecency With a Child, or other legal terminology. Several articles mention that a suspect was charged with “kissing a child.” There is no criminal charge for “kissing” an elementary student. Instead, the suspect is typically charged with the correct legal term, Indecency with a Child. This type of journalistic phrasing blends inappropriate teacher conduct that may be viewed as unethical with teacher conduct that is both sexual and criminal in nature. This serves as another example of misleading terminology surrounding cases of illicit teacher conduct.

Below are various sample phrases that were intertwined with legal jargon pulled from articles in the study (see Table 17).

Table 17. Description of Sexual Acts Within Article

Salacious Terminology For Specific Sexual Acts		
Touched Over Clothes	Performed Oral Sex	Hugged Students
Molesting	Flirting	Touched Breasts
Kissed on Mouth	Made Advances	Fondling
Seduced	Sexual Intercourse	Cuddling
Spanking Teacher’s Rear End	Tickling	Pursued
Put Hand Down Pants/Shirt	Exposed Himself	Sent Nude Pictures
Made Sex Video	Unzipped Pants	Put Tongue in Mouth
Got On Her Knees	Making Out	Placed Head B/W His Legs
Rubbed Himself on Her	Sexted	Cheated on Wife
Sent Photos in Underwear	Pleasuring Himself	Full Contact Lap Dance
Deviate Sexual Intercourse	Lewd Behavior	Pushed Him Against Desk
Pulled Down His Shorts	Open Mouth Kiss	Asked Girl for Sex
Had Her Touch His Genitals	Caught Pair in Bed	Sex with Him Was Painful
Fantasized About Sex	Engaged in Sex	Made Contact with His Penis
Commented on Size of His Penis	Masturbating	Commented on His Sex Life
Bent Her Over	Groped	Pulled Her Hair
Had Threesome with Students	Gave a Backrub	Touched Her Underwear

SCOPE OF COVERAGE

Location of Sexual Activity

News coverage in most cases includes descriptive information surrounding the location of the sexual acts. When teachers are caught “in the act,” news articles often mention this in detail. A large majority of articles contain reports listing the locations of the sexual contact between teacher and student, complete with graphic details written with colorful language (see Table 18). School level, gender, age, race, or teaching position do not appear to influence news reports with the location of the criminal activity as most of the 308 articles tend to include these details.

Table 18. Location of Criminal Act Mentioned in Article

Location of Illicit Sexual Activity		
Drove to Hotel for Sex	Sex in Classroom	Sex in Car
Sex in Motel Parking Lot	Sex at His Apartment	Sex in Rent-By-Hour Motel
At Student's House	At Teacher's Home	Oral Sex in Classroom
In Vacant Classrooms	Sex in His Truck	Took to Locker Room for Sex
In Parent's Home	Caught in Bed	Against a Desk
Found in Portable Building	In Backseat of Car	In Her House After Kids Asleep

Discovery of Sexual Activity

In addition to location, the importance of providing details of how the teacher was caught or how the allegations came to light is seen in almost every teacher case. If the charges were not so serious and devastating to victims, this list might seem to prove that these cases provide media fodder that minimizes or trivializes the damage of teacher sexual assault (see Table 19). Of 104 cases, 12 (12 percent) involve a parent discovery of their child's sexual abuse. Another significant finding is seen in how media reports on the use of technology and social media in these cases. In 53 out of 104 cases (51 percent), the articles mention technology or social media as a method of communication between the teacher and the student. These communications are enabled by cell phones, photo and video sharing, Instagram, Omegle, Snapchat, Facebook, Flickr, Grindr, emails, and the Internet. Included below are a sampling of some of the phrases used in the news reports to describe how the abuse allegations came to light. The list is included to illustrate how the assaultive nature of these crimes is diminished by detail after detail of discussion about "nude" or "naked" pictures and videos rather than referring to them as child pornography in the possession of an adult authority figure.

Table 19. Discovery of Illicit Sexual Activity Mentioned in Article

Discovery of Illicit Sexual Activity	
Teacher Asked for Naked Pictures	Police Found Naked Pictures
Rumors Surfaced About Video of Sex	Police Found Abandoned Briefcase with Porn
Mom Found Sex Videos and Texts	Dad Check Phone Records
School Saw Suspicious Twitter Post	Police Retrieved Kik.com Messages
Teen Reported Graphic Emails	Principal Sent Nude Pictures to Student
Mom Caught Man Running from Home	Police Found Grindr Dating App Texts
Student Shared Sex Video with Friends	Employee Found Porn on Teacher's Laptop
Police Found 24,000 Texts in a Year	Teacher Showed Up Drunk at After-Prom Party
Witness Saw Pair on a Date	Police Found Photos of Genitals on Phone
Student Recorded Lap Dance on Video	Guard Caught Pair at Night in a Portable
Student Told a Coach About Contact	Employee Caught Teacher Assault in Bathroom
Fellow Teacher Reported Suspicions	Police Found Lingerie Photos of Teen on Phone

As the examination of articles took place, an understanding takes place as to the difficulty one has in describing the sexual acts that took place in the 308 news reports. It is problematic to release previously held notions in the discussion of sexual behavior. Clearly, a struggle takes place from my perspective in maintaining an even pattern of terminology throughout this chapter. After examining so many news reports containing informal language and with deliberate terminology that sensationalized the events surrounding the topic of teacher sexual abuse, an awareness emerges as to the power of journalists and news directors in influencing public opinion by choosing to utilize deliberately designed headlines and by reporting salacious details within many of the news stories. Another discovery occurs as to how much closer our local newspapers have morphed into tabloid media and cable news outlets as far as enticing readers and tantalizing viewers with language similarly found in romance novels and gossip magazines.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Finally, the goal of this research is to examine and analyze news reports to see

how teacher sexual misconduct cases are portrayed and framed by the news media. This final section addresses the research questions.

Research Question 1

How are the participants and case details portrayed and framed by the media and what aspects are specifically highlighted? Most authors appear to specifically focus on language in titles to emphasize the educator's job title, such as "teacher" or "coach," in conjunction with being a sexual perpetrator in 100 percent of the 308 news articles. Extracurricular sponsors and coaches are all portrayed using their job titles. The use of inaccurate in both the titles and texts within articles seems to be a significant problem in that words such as "sex case" and "affair" were frequently utilized and have the potential to minimize the seriousness of teacher sexual assault. Teachers are sometimes portrayed as perpetrators, but often are portrayed as one part of a romantic couple. The terminology that portrays the sexual assault as a "rendezvous" or "liaison" not only minimizes the teacher's actions, but it also shifts blame and places some responsibility on the young victim. Journalists often portray students as willing participants by using phrases such as the students was "caught in bed with the teacher," "participated in a threesome," and "went to the teacher's house after her kids were asleep." Sexual manipulation is not treated the same as sexual assault.

Research Question 2

What patterns emerge in an analysis of terminology used in reporting teacher-student sexual abuse cases? Titles of articles often fail to match the actual title of the legal criminal charge. Rather than reporting that a teacher was charged with Improper

Relationship Between Educator and Student, journalists frequently resort to implying that the teacher in question is being charged with trivialized actions such as “having sex,” “tickling a student,” or “dating a student.” Again, salacious terminology and attention to sexual details seem to be more important and place the focus on seduction-type language such as “having sex” rather than “sexually assaulted a student.” In addition, facts such as the following are not only mentioned in almost every case, but they are also frequently emphasized with descriptive terminology:

- location of sexual behavior, how the teacher-student pair was caught
- how technology played a part in the development of their ‘relationship’
- how technology allowed them to carry on an illegal relationship undetected

This is problematic in that the lack of emphasis on legal terminology negates the aspect of criminal behavior and punishment according to our legal justice system. Since a large majority of these cases of these cases have not been processed through the entire system, a reader is simply left with the scandalous details and may not ever learn about the serious consequences of the criminality of educators. This furthers the findings of Sampert who focused on the media practice of shortening the words “sexual attack” to “sex attack,” which puts the emphasis on the issue of sex rather than on the assaultive nature of the attack.

Research Question 3

Does media coverage in regards to written text differ based on the general characteristics of the teacher, student, and/or school district? Gender of the teacher and

victim appears to influence how the participants are portrayed. National and international news outlets are quick to cover those cases involving female teachers with teenage male victims in secondary schools. The findings here align with the research of Fromuth, Holt, and Parker (2002) that argue that media focuses on the stereotype that an adolescent male is somehow unharmed by an older female in comparison to the harm that is implied with an adolescent female when the abuser is an older adult male. In addition, the decision as to whether a national or international news outlet covers a local Texas story of teacher sexual misconduct is dependent on the gender, age, and race of participants. Hispanic males make up 25 percent of offending teachers, yet none have their stories covered by the national press. Another discovery includes that while elementary and high school females make up the majority of those victimized by male teachers, middle school and junior high males are more likely to be victimized in those educational settings. News coverage appears to be also biased depending on gender and age of the victim. Finally, a school district's demographics, community type, and size, appear to have no impact on media coverage and terminology utilized in articles. Rural news reports are just as likely to have salacious details as large-market news reports.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation is to examine news articles about teacher sexual misconduct in order to analyze how the details are portrayed by the media. The basis for this research involves analysis of news articles to determine how participants and details are presented and to understand how coverage varies according to teacher, victim, and district characteristics. This final chapter begins with a summary of results for both the demographic data and the content analysis. The second section contains a summary discussion and implications discussion highlighting previous literature and how this study sheds light on the body of work surrounding teacher misconduct and the media. The third section contains a discussion of research implications in the areas of theory, methodology, and policy change. This is followed by a discussion of limitations in research. Finally, suggestions are made for additional future research.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Regarding demographic data contained in media coverage of teacher sexual misconduct cases, the intersectionality of gender, race, and age plays a role. In Texas, the overwhelming majority of Texas teachers are women. In this study, the majority of offending teachers are male (68 percent). When it comes to race, the majority of Texas teachers are white and those statistics matched the 104 teachers under analysis. When race and gender intersect, most of the teachers in this study are White males, White females, or Hispanic males.

Most of the teachers in this study are classroom teachers (81 percent) with a large majority located primarily at high schools (62 percent). Almost half (42 percent) are assigned to an extracurricular duty that involved athletics, music or drama, ROTC, or

academic/club sponsorship. Previous literature by researchers such as Brackenridge (1994), Nielson (2001), and Gervis and Dunn (2004) pointed to a lack of research of sexual harassment and sexual assault by coaches. The fact that one-third of teachers in this study are athletic coaches and trainers shines the light on the need for an inspection of junior and senior high school coaches and their interactions with student-athletes, along with research on the role of media.

According to sexual victimization statistics by gender, 91 percent of victims of sexual assault in the United States are female, while 9 percent are male (National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2015:1). Total victimization statistics in this study on victimization of Texas students do not conform to those national figures. Instead, in this study, 52 percent are female victims and 40 percent are male victims, while 8 percent are unknown gender. Furthermore, 83 of 120 victims (69 percent) are junior high and high school students. Of the 83 junior high and high school victims, 38 (46 percent) are male and 45 (54 percent) are female. If the national average by gender is 9 percent for male sexual victimization, this study illustrates a much higher victimization rate for males.

District data shows that teacher sexual impropriety is an issue that impacts public school districts from smaller rural areas to larger urban areas. The district list includes 74 school districts. In addition, private schools and charter schools are not immune from this problem as there are six private/charter schools in this study.

The content analysis involves articles from online newspaper and television news outlets in rural, local, regional, state, national, and international markets when available. Small news markets are just as likely to use sensationalized headlines and terminology as those in urban areas. Significant findings surround how certain cases are portrayed and how these cases garner national and international coverage, largely based on gender, race, age, and the peculiar sexual details of the news story. Stories involving

an older white female teacher with a teenage male student are most likely to attract the attention of national or international news sources. Headlines and terminology are an interesting aspect of each misconduct case. Every article headline in this study describes the perpetrator by specific school job title rather than by gender or other attribute. In addition, the use of vague or ambiguous sexual terminology is commonplace and is frequently entangled with the appropriate legal terminology. The media practice of using imprecise language to describe sexual abuse has the capacity to confuse the reader, to minimize the criminality of the act, and to imply that these illicit teacher-student relationships are consensual, particularly in those involving adolescent victims. In addition, news articles in this study often contain details such as location and discovery of the alleged sexual crimes. This practice of mentioning hotels, the backseat of cars, and sex tapes also has the capacity to muddle the issue of sexual abuse.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

While it has been shown that some teachers sexually harass and assault students, the large majority do not engage in this criminal activity. Educator sexual abuse has a long list of consequences for individuals, their families, the community, and the institution of education itself. For the victims, they are left with psychological and physical pain, sexual dysfunction, public shame, ridicule, mistrust of the educational and justice systems, and other challenges that they must face. Previous literature by Fromuth, Holt, and Parker (2002) points out frequency of this abuse by showing that almost one-fourth of students from 8th grade to 11th grade say that they had been sexually molested or assaulted by a teacher.

This study sheds light on the scope of this issue, especially with the large numbers of adolescent victims. Over 120 Texas students are alleged sexual abuse victims and are forced to share intimate sexual details with school officials and law enforcement,

are required to testify in a public courtroom, face scrutiny among their peers, find themselves to be pregnant, attempt suicide, transfer to other school districts, and/or are alienated from their own families. Teachers in this study face consequences for their behavior as well. Some of these consequences included public shame and humiliation, ridicule, loss of career, loss of marriage and family, incarceration in prison, fines, registration as a sex offender, loss of teacher certification, long-term probationary requirements, and permanent placement on Internet websites with details of their illicit behavior. At least 2 of the 104 teachers in this study committed suicide as the result of allegations or prosecution for their crimes. School districts also struggle with the impact of educator sexual abuse. Bad publicity, scrutiny, anger, mistrust, and the threat of expensive lawsuits plague both small and large districts alike.

Most teachers, coaches, sponsors, and administrators exhibit appropriate behavior and respectful conduct. Yet a small group of offending teachers receive a great deal of exposure in the media. Educators used to be held with high regard, not utilized for fodder by late-night talk show hosts and entertainment blogs. As previous literature by Drew and Weaver (1990) points out, there is an intersection of informational news with entertainment news. The implications are that journalists play a vital role in how the public perceives the educational profession as a whole.

Previous literature on media exploitation provides an underpinning that shows how journalists, editors, and news directors play a significant role in framing stories about Texas teachers in this study. As Sikes (2008) illustrated, a 1999 case transformed media coverage, while studies by Dowler (2006) and Miller, Hefner, and Leon (2014) provide a link showing the advantage of coverage linked with sex and sexual crimes. Breen (2000) discusses the practice of agenda-setting by the media. Research by Sampert (2010) provides a valuable parallel. Her study shows how the media chooses to utilize

words such as ‘sex’ for ‘sexual’ and ‘fooling around’ for ‘rape.’ In choosing their words and phrases with the goal of advancing readership and selling subscriptions and advertisements, journalists are also perpetuating harmful stereotypes of both teachers and their young victims. Articles in this study support these previous studies and are shown to attempt to entice readers, especially those with headlines that scream phrases such as “teacher has threesome” and “teacher performs lap dance” and “teacher performs oral sex on 8th grader.” These headlines and phrases lead to confusion and misperception as to the harm of sexual assault and victimization by trusted authority figures. These examples shed light on the scope of this issue in Texas.

Previous academic literature also points out that media exploitation is often based on gender and gender stereotypes. Sampert (2010) looks at double standards in news reports and the public’s fascination with female perpetrators. Knoll (2010) discusses gender bias in terminology. Researchers Chisney-Lind and Mouland (2006) detail the use of a ‘bad girl’ in stories by sharing intimate portrayals of attractive female criminals. Implications are that the victims, particularly male students, are somehow not harmed by this type of sexual abuse. Further implications are that these young male victims are enjoying a youthful initiation into sexuality provided by a nurturing older female teacher, rather than surviving a sexual assault. This study advances the previous literature involving media exploitation. To illustrate the observation that gender influences media exploitation in certain types of cases, 15 Texas cases received national and international coverage. Eleven of 13 (85 percent) feature stories about white female teachers. A glaring omission in coverage occurs through the observation that even though 25 percent of cases in this study involve Hispanic males; none of these cases are chosen for coverage by national or international news sources. Three of the female teachers are from rural school districts and from small-town media markets. Why are these obscure cases worthy of

coverage by *The Huffington Post* and the *New York Daily News*? All involved a White female teacher and male adolescent. Their stories contain unusual distinctions and intimate details, beginning with local coverage, then followed up by national online news sources. In fact, most of the 33 female teachers in our data set are portrayed in news articles with phrases such as a “randy band teacher,” a “married mother of four,” and “having sex all summer long.” Many of the articles read like a steamy romance novel by journalists and news directors who are intentionally feeding the public’s insatiable appetite for sex and scandal, thereby giving people what they want.

Theoretical implications of this study show the importance of utilizing a social construction perspective to study the impact of media coverage, which is based on the idea that human beings interpret and construct their world from narratives based on meanings, language, and symbols. Media is a participant in this construct and helps shape public opinion on everyday life and on societal issues. Previous literature by Knoll (2010) shows the lack of academic research on teacher misconduct and points to the reliance on news articles. It is important to understand how stereotyping and inaccuracy in news reports, whether intentional or unintentional, can have an impact on public reaction to a particular topic. In this case, how the media portrays the topic of teacher sexual misconduct has a direct influence on whether the public sees the topic as either a harmful social problem or as a problem that only impacts a small number of individuals. This dissertation advances the notion that examination of language and sexual undertones used by journalists is beneficial because readers are constructing their standpoints based almost exclusively on media portrayal.

Methodological implications of this study show the advantage of using a blend of content analysis and discourse analysis methodology. Using a combined methodology allows for an objective analysis with a loosely based expectation of what particular

content would be found. CA and DA allow for an imprecise selection involving units of analysis that permit a natural progression of categories that result from looking at commonalities in news articles. Teacher, Victim, and District characteristics are general and are then followed by themes that derive from language and terminology in article titles. Mixed methodology can be a useful tool for future evaluation.

Policy implications and advances derive from a better understanding of how media drives the issue of teacher sexual abuse. Policy changes would help protect generations of students from teachers who commit sexual crimes. How can public opinion and policy changes take place if these cases are covered as entertainment by tabloid journalists? Most of these cases appear to be treated as simply cases of crossed boundaries and bad judgement. If case after case is covered with sensationalized details of 'sex', how does public outrage ever gain momentum enough to form opposition and special interest groups to affect legislative changes to our educational system?

The protection and prevention of sexual abuse of school children should be in the heart of every parent, community member, educator, school district, lawmaker, law enforcement officer, and judicial member. The examination of stereotyping and sensationalism by the news media might help us better understand the role of media and its influence on public opinion. Rather than providing titillation and entertainment, unbiased news reports should inform the public when teacher misconduct occurs. Focus should be on efforts to educate teachers, students, and staff with programs for healthy boundary guidelines, recognition of grooming patterns, appropriate use of social media and communication technology, and proper reporting procedures for students and school personnel. Improved guidelines and increased monitoring access by district technology personnel might be deterrents to inappropriate communication between teachers and students. Based on the findings, supervision of teachers in regards to inappropriate

behavior is clearly lacking. School districts can use this type of research for improvement in their employee screening procedures, stronger professional conduct policies, school safety, and district-wide bullying programs. This analysis of news articles found that media coverage tends to illustrate locations of illicit behavior. As a result, it is obvious that teachers and students are sometimes isolated and unsupervised. Examples of changes can be seen in open-door-only policies and school facilities built with the capability for monitoring staff and students.

The result of teacher sexual abuse not only impacts individuals involved, but it also has serious repercussions for the school district and for the institution of education. Most people might be influenced to take action if the “lap dance” teacher in this study had been portrayed as the teacher “who committed a serious sexual assault upon an innocent student.” Rather than with sexualized stereotypes, offending teachers need to be held accountable and thereby presented in by the media and portrayed as true criminals with realistic consequences. To be more specific, media representation of white female perpetrators with young adolescent victims is biased with use of provocative language and stereotypical portrayal. Previous literature by Shakeshaft and Cohan (1995) demonstrates media coverage to be slanted to show a teacher or coach in a sympathetic manner, while the student-victim is made to be the outcast. This study illuminates media’s ability to frame a story, sway public opinion, and to impact reaction to sexual abuse of students. More importantly, media misrepresentation has a negative effect on the perception that teacher sexual misconduct is a *social problem* that needs immediate attention from the public, advocacy groups, the legislature, law enforcement, and the judicial system.

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations and shortcomings with all research projects. With that in

mind, there must be an acknowledgement that prejudice and bias unavoidably exists because of the interpretive nature of social science. Macnamara (2005:2) points out that even Berger and Luckman, authors of the classic work, *The Social Construction of Reality*, admitted that the most stringent scientific social research cannot yield perfectly objective outcomes. One particular weakness of qualitative research is in the area of bias. As Anderson (2010:2) states, individual skills, personal biases, and idiosyncrasies can heavily influence research quality. Thus, the researcher's preconceived notions may lead to the problem of construct validity. While the focus is on news coverage of each individual accused of sexual misconduct, there is an attempt to control for this problem by examining news reports from a wide variety of electronic news mediums and by utilizing diverse newspaper sources from a variety of locations and reporters. Since one person is examining articles and performing the coding process, content analysis of messages and themes has a consistent intercoder reliability.

There are various personal life circumstances that may be of a concern that could result in research bias. My role as an educator, a parent, a criminologist, and an ex-police officer could certainly be seen as a possible influence as to my interpretation of news articles concerning the sexual abuse of young students. One specific bias might come in the form of my personal connection to the teaching profession. I have been a secondary educator for over 27 years, with my own morals and regards for personal boundaries with students. Also, as a mother of two teenage sons, I acknowledge my concerns that they could be harmed by sexual abuse by an educator or coach. My research is conducted

from an objective standpoint point to eliminate researcher bias while examining details of teachers who have crossed moral and professional lines with students.

Another limitation might is in my use of data from one single year and from one state. The problem this causes is that consideration for factors that were unique to Texas or those specific to the year 2014 may not factor into the findings. This drawback is addressed by focusing on how different news outlets cover the same teacher, victim, and details and how journalists present written text and sexual undertones surrounding the story. Rather than performing a comparative analysis of how media attention has shifted, this study focuses on a comparative investigation of how various media outlets portray the same instances surrounding each teacher sexual abuse story. If enough articles are available from a variety of different sources, the fact that the data set from a previous 2014 study is not a prohibitive factor.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Future research in the area of teacher sexual misconduct can lead to several distinct avenues. At the forefront should be continued research into the impact and influence of the media when it comes to portrayal of teachers, victims, and instances of sexual abuse. Specifically, more work should be done in the area of examining the work of researchers, such as Sampert, to better understand the deliberate nature of journalistic choices in terminology in titles as well as within the texts of articles. The lack of positive and respectful educator examples could have the propensity for altering the status of education as a whole. If a news outlet only carries stories that show a whimsical look at “Teachers Gone Wild,” then how else would we expect the public to perceive all educators? As found in this study, white female teachers who have sexually abused

adolescent male students are portrayed in a sexualized and stereotypical manner by local, regional, national, and international media. The efforts of Sutherland (2003) to expose the double-standards in news reporting can be advanced by future studies to observe the impact of gender and other demographic information. In addition, perhaps a closer look should involve the possibility that the gender of the author can influence how the story and teacher are framed in the news article.

Future studies should examine the impact of sexual abuse terminology on the development of uniform policy. Is it possible that the use of the word 'sex' rather than 'sexual assault' can influence a news reader's attitude and reaction to a story about teacher sexual abuse? If so, we should continue to explore ways to evaluate this possibility. Journalists, editors, and news directors need to understand the impact of sexual undertones and bias in news coverage and additional research could lead to better awareness of their responsibility for accurate news reports.

More research in the area of extracurricular duties of teacher may shed light on this issue. To be exact, 44 of the 104 teachers in this study are also assigned duties that require them to spend time alone with students outside of the regular class day. Singling out these cases and cases like them for further review would be a valuable source of information for changes in safety and sexual abuse prevention. Certainly, more specific research would be helpful in the development of teacher training programs and ethics training for all educators.

Future research can address the aspect of victimization of school children. The most common age of victims of both genders in this study is 16 years of age. The spotlight for prevention programs has generally focused on female sexual victimization and awareness of the danger of strangers. Findings from this study mean that teenage

males are also at high risk for manipulation, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. This substantiates the need for additional research.

Based on the information presented in this study, only a handful of teachers were caught and reported by their fellow staff members or supervisors. In addition, only one of the 104 teachers was caught by school technology staff who monitor district servers and social media. Information gathered in future analyses could lead to better procedures for students and staff to report inappropriate and criminal conduct in schools. All segments of society, including media, school personnel, parents, law enforcement, legal officials, lawmakers, and members of the community, should push for future research to challenge this issue that continues plague school districts at the local, state, and national level.

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APPENDIX A
TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Teacher Code	Teacher Age	Teacher Race and Gender
M1	39	Hispanic Male
M2	32	White Male
M3	33	Hispanic Male
M4	33	White Male
F1	24	White Female
M5	46	Hispanic Male
M6	54	White Male
M7	38	White Male
F2	34	White Female
M8	33	White Male
M9	46	White Male
M10	51	White Male
M11	56	Black Male
M12	43	White Male
M13	30	White Male
M14	27	Hispanic Male
M15	32	White Male
M16	50	Black Male
F3	40	White Female
F4	20	White Female
F5	22	White Female
M17	29	Hispanic Male
M18	28	White Male
M19	38	White Male
M20	28	White Male
M21	27	Hispanic Male
M22	40	Hispanic Male
M23	66	White Male
M24	35	White Male
M25	35	Hispanic Male
F6	39	White Female
M26	35	Black Male
F7	36	White Female
M27	36	White Male
F8	35	White Female
M28	24	White Male
M29	43	White Male
F9	25	White Female
M30	28	White Male
M31	47	White Male
F10	43	White Female

F11	49	White Female
M32	41	White Male
M33	44	Hispanic Male
F12	29	White Female
M34	22	Hispanic Male
M35	41	Hispanic Male
F13	33	White Female
F14	46	White Female
M36	38	Hispanic Male
F15	34	White Female
F16	30	White Female
F17	33	White Female
M37	30	Hispanic Male
F18	25	White Female
M38	34	Hispanic Male
M39	31	Black Male
M40	31	White Male
M41	39	White Male
M42	29	White Male
F19	30	White Female
M43	34	White Male
F20	31	Hispanic Female
M44	51	Hispanic Male
F21	41	White Female
M45	41	White Male
M46	44	Hispanic Male
M47	61	Hispanic Male
M48	48	White Male
M49	27	White Male
M50	24	White Male
M51	34	Hispanic Male
M52	56	Hispanic Male
F22	33	White Female
F23	32	Hispanic Female
F24	25	White Female
F25	46	Hispanic Female
M53	50	White Male
M54	28	Hispanic Male
F26	42	Black Female
F27	23	White Female
M55	44	Black Male
M56	39	Hispanic Male

M57	36	White Male
M58	24	Black Male
M59	44	White Male
M60	37	Black Male
F28	26	White Female
F29	34	White Female
M61	29	White Male
M62	51	Black Male
M63	45	White Male
M64	51	Hispanic Male
M65	33	Hispanic Male
M66	30	Hispanic Male
F30	50	White Female
F31	32	White Female
M67	24	White Male
M68	62	White Male
M69	38	Hispanic Male
F32	35	White Female
M70	18	White Male
M71	54	Hispanic Male
F33	24	White Female

APPENDIX B
VICTIM DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Teacher Code	N Victims	Victim Age (Years)	Victim Gender
M1	1	5	Female
M2	1	13	Male
M3	3	5,6, & 8	Female
M4	1	14	Female
F1	3	14,16, & 17	Male
M5	2	9 & 9	Female
M6	1	Teenager	Female
M7	1	15	Male
F2	1	17	Male
M8	1	H.S. Age	N/A
M9	Multiple	12-17	M & F
M10	1	12	Female
M11	1	16	Female
M12	Multiple	Underage	Male
M13	1	14	Female
M14	1	17	Female
M15	1	17	Female
M16	1	15	Female
F3	1	N/A	N/A
F4	1	15	Female
F5	1	17	Male
M17	1	< 16	Female
M18	2	15 & 15	Female
M19	1	18	Female
M20	1	<14	N/A
M21	1	16	Female
M22	1	16	Female
M23	Multiple	14-16	Male
M24	1	17	Female
M25	1	17	Female
F6	1	17	Male
M26	1	15	Male
F7	2	H.S. Age	Male
M27	1	H.S. Age	Female
F8	3	16,16, & 16	Male
M28	2	H.S. Age	Female
M29	1	15	Male
F9	1	18	Female
M30	2	H.S. Age	N/A
M31	1	18	Female
F10	1	15	Male

F11	1	19	Male
M32	1	16	Female
M33	1	6	Female
F12	1	15	Male
M34	1	16	Female
M35	2	6 & 10	Female
F13	1	13	Male
F14	1	14	Male
M36	1	15	Female
F15	3	15,15, & 15	Male
F16	1	15	Male
F17	1	17	Male
M37	1	14	Female
F18	1	15	Female
M38	2	2nd Grade	Female
M39	1	16	Female
M40	1	17	Female
M41	1	H.S. Age	Female
M42	1	14	Female
F19	1	17	Male
M43	1	16	Female
F20	1	17	Male
M44	1	6	Female
F21	2	15 & 16	Male
M45	2	9 & 9	Female
M46	1	16	Female
M47	2	6th Grade	Male
M48	1	H.S. Age	Female
M49	1	H.S. Age	Female
M50	1	H.S. Age	Female
M51	1	16	Female
M52	3	16,16, & 17	Male
F22	1	13	Male
F23	1	17	Male
F24	1	16	Male
F25	1	16	Male
M53	3	H.S. Age	Male
M54	1	17	Female
F26	1	15	Male
F27	1	18	Male
M55	1	17	Female
M56	1	16	Female
M57	1	16	Female

M58	1	16	Female
M59	Multiple	H.S. Age	Female
M60	1	16	Male
F28	1	16	Male
F29	1	17	Male
M61	1	17	Female
M62	1	14	Female
M63	Multiple	Elem. Age	Female
M64	2	17 & 17	Female
M65	1	16	Female
M66	1	17	Female
F30	1	16	Male
F31	1	18	Male
M67	1	17	Female
M68	1	11	Male
M69	1	8	Female
F32	1	16	Male
M70	Multiple	14 & 15	M & F
M71	1	10	Male
F33	1	17	Male

APPENDIX C
TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND PRIVATE/CHARTER SCHOOLS BY
COMMUNITY TYPE AND SIZE

District List	Community Type	District Size (Students)
Abbott ISD	Rural	Under 500
Abilene ISD	Other Central City	10,000 to 24,999
Aldine ISD	Major Suburban	50,000 and Over
Alief ISD	Major Suburban	25,000 to 49,999
Allen ISD	Other Central City Suburban	10,000 to 24,999
Alvin ISD	Major Suburban	10,000 to 24,999
Amarillo ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
Austin ISD	Major Urban	50,000 and Over
Bastrop ISD	Independent Town	5,000 to 9,999
Beaumont ISD	Other Central City	10,000 to 24,999
Big Sandy ISD	Rural	500 to 999
Brazosport ISD	Other Central City	10,000 to 24,999
Brownsville: IDEA Frontier Prep	Private or Charter School	N/A
Bryan ISD	Other Central City	10,000 to 24,999
Burnet CISD	Other Central City Suburban	3,000 to 4,999
Caldwell ISD	Other Central City Suburban	1,600 to 2,999
Carrollton: St. Anthony School	Private or Charter School	N/A
China Spring ISD	Other Central City Suburban	1,600 to 2,999
Columbus ISD	Non-Metropolitan Stable	1,600 to 2,999
Como-Pickton CISD	Rural	500 to 999
Copperas Cove ISD	Other Central City Suburban	5,000 to 9,999
Corpus Christi ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	Major Suburban	50,000 and Over
Dallas ISD	Major Urban	50,000 and Over
Denison ISD	Other Central City Suburban	3,000 to 4,999
Denton ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
DeSoto ISD	Major Suburban	5,000 to 9,999
Ector County ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
Edgewood ISD	Major Suburban	10,000 to 24,999
El Campo ISD	Independent Town	3,000 to 4,999
El Paso ISD	Major Urban	50,000 and Over
El Paso: Harmony School of Innov.	Private or Charter School	N/A
Floydada ISD	Rural	500 to 999
Fort Bend ISD	Major Suburban	50,000 and Over
Fort Stockton ISD	Non-Metropolitan Stable	1,600 to 2,999
Frankston ISD	Rural	500 to 999
Freer ISD	Rural	500 to 999
Frisco ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
Ft. Worth ISD	Major Urban	50,000 and Over
Ganado ISD	Rural	500 to 999
Hallsburg ISD	Rural	Under 500

Houston ISD	Major Urban	50,000 and Over
Humble ISD	Major Suburban	25,000 to 49,999
Hurst-Eules-Bedford ISD	Major Suburban	10,000 to 24,999
Judson ISD	Major Suburban	10,000 to 24,999
Katy ISD	Major Suburban	50,000 and Over
Killeen ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
Kingsville ISD	Independent Town	3,000 to 4,999
La Joya ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
Leander ISD	Major Suburban	25,000 to 49,999
Lewisville ISD	Major Suburban	50,000 and Over
Longview ISD	Other Central City	5,000 to 9,999
Mansfield ISD	Major Suburban	25,000 to 49,999
McKinney ISD	Other Central City Suburban	10,000 to 24,999
Midland ISD	Other Central City	10,000 to 24,999
Navasota ISD	Other Central City Suburban	3,000 to 4,999
New Braunfels: NB Christian Acad.	Private or Charter School	N/A
Northside ISD	Major Urban	50,000 and Over
Orange: St. Mary's School	Private or Charter School	N/A
Paducah ISD	Rural	Under 500
Pasadena ISD	Major Suburban	50,000 and Over
Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD	Other Central City	25,000 to 49,999
Plano ISD	Major Suburban	50,000 and Over
Port Arthur ISD	Other Central City Suburban	5,000 to 9,999
Princeton ISD	Non-Metropolitan Fast Growing	3,000 to 4,999
Rice ISD	Other Central City Suburban	500 to 999
Richardson ISD	Major Suburban	25,000 to 49,999
Rio Hondo ISD	Non-Metropolitan Stable	1,600 to 2,999
Rio Vista ISD	Rural	500 to 999
Ropes ISD	Rural	Under 500
Salado ISD	Other Central City Suburban	1,000 to 1,599
Shallowater ISD	Other Central City Suburban	1,000 to 1,599
Spring Branch ISD	Major Suburban	25,000 to 49,999
Trinity ISD	Non-Metropolitan Stable	1,000 to 1,599
Vidor ISD	Other Central City Suburban	3,000 to 4,999
Waco: Waco Baptist Academy	Private or Charter School	N/A
Waskom ISD	Non-Metropolitan Stable	500 to 999
Wellman-Union CISD	Rural	Under 500
Willis ISD	Other Central City Suburban	5,000 to 9,999
Ysleta ISD	Major Urban	25,000 to 49,999

Texas Education Agency (TEA) Sources:

<http://tea.texas.gov/acctres/analyze/1314/level.html>

<https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/snapshot/2014/distsize.html>

APPENDIX D

IRB Letter of Approval



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378
email: IRB@twu.edu
<http://www.twu.edu/irb.html>

DATE: September 24, 2015

TO: Ms. Linda Lancaster
Sociology & Social Work

FROM: Institutional Review Board - Denton

Re: *Exemption for Social Construction of Illicit Teacher-Student Relationships in High School: A Media Analysis (Protocol #: 18582)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was determined to be exempt from further review.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. Because a signed consent form is not required for exempt studies, the filing of signatures of participants with the TWU IRB is not necessary.

Although your protocol has been exempted from further IRB review and your protocol file has been closed, any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All forms are located on the IRB website. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

cc. Dr. Celia Lo, Sociology & Social Work
Dr. James L. Williams, Sociology & Social Work
Graduate School