

LEGALIZING AMBIVALENT SEXISM:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
PEOPLE V. TURNER COURT LETTERS

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ABSTRACT

Gender roles and sexism are two problems that are still being combatted in our society today. This is largely due to a lack of awareness of the many ways that sexism can be presented. These issues have recently been gaining some attention through nationally recognized social movements such as #MeToo and Time's Up. This thesis is a content analysis of the letters submitted during the People v. Turner sentencing hearing. These letters are analyzed for patterns of ambivalent sexism. Ambivalent sexism is the combination of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. In order to investigate the prevalence of ambivalent sexism within this legal setting, I reviewed each of the 45 letters submitted to the court using both an inductive and deductive approach. From the analysis of the letters, two themes came to light. This study emphasizes the importance of language. The words that are chosen, either in conversation or in a legal context, play a part in allowing sexism to become normalized and accepted. This is an important study because ambivalent sexism runs rampant throughout society. This issue must be fully understood before we can make strides towards a long-lasting solution. More research should be encouraged in order to raise awareness in the general public and get closer to reaching gender equality in all areas of society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Support of gender roles and sexism runs rampant around the world. While steps have been taken to address the inequality between genders, many people remain unaware of the issues. Due to such unawareness, a general belief that the problem no longer exists is still pervasive. The reality is that sexism plays a part in all of our lives, whether we realize it or not. One of the ways in which sexism becomes insidious and permissible is through normalizing behavior that is in fact problematic. An example of such behavior is what some theorists refer to as “ambivalent sexism” (Glick and Fiske 1996: 494).

The #MeToo movement is a current example that describes the harmful and violent effects of sexism, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and rape. This movement highlights the frequency with which these detrimental experiences occur. The first quote shown on the #MeToo movement webpage (www.metoomvmt.org) is “You are not alone. 17,700,000 women have reported a sexual assault since 1998.” Some people do not realize how deceptive sexism may be and how often it leads to larger problems. In my previous research analyzing the television show “Breaking Bad,” I studied how partners in romantic relationships exhibit patterns of ambivalent sexism.

I was originally interested in the portrayal of gender roles in the television series. This idea then became focused on how females interacted with their romantic partners within the series. From this point, and through the analysis, the study developed a more specific concentration on the theory of ambivalent sexism and how it is exhibited in romantic relationships in the series. I found three overarching themes which included women being protected by men, women being taken advantage of, and women being stereotyped in a seemingly positive way.

Ambivalent sexism is the combination of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. The idea is that men actively engage in prejudice against women; this can be done in an aggressive manner or in a seemingly positive manner. Benevolent sexism can be hard to recognize due to the positive feelings it elicits (Glick and Fiske 1996: 491). This theory remains unexplored despite the fact of prevalent ambivalent sexism in our culture. By simply explaining the concept of this study to others, many realize that they had either witnessed ambivalent sexism occurring or had even been the person behind the act.

Prior research on ambivalent sexism has primarily consisted of psychological studies that view the reactions that both men and women have towards ambivalent sexism. Of the studies I found, only one of them contained a qualitative study within the mixed methods design that analyzed essays written by the participants. None of these studies connect their discussions to the field of law. While the studies previously conducted are crucial to building our understanding of ambivalent sexism, it is important to be able to critically analyze all forms of media for these problematic examples. Further, it is important to discuss how ambivalent sexism may play out in court cases, as well as day-to-day interactions that may lead to larger problems.

I have chosen to write my thesis on the topic of ambivalent sexism and how frequently this occurs in our society. My topic and research for my thesis is coming during a time when the general public is starting to more aware of the prevalence of sexism in the routine aspects of daily lives. As explained before, sexual harassment, sexual assault, marital rape, and cat calls are just some of the many forms that hostile sexism takes place. Benevolent sexism can occur when women are forced into certain roles due to stereotypes of being more motherly, nurturing, emotional, compassionate, or

intuitive. Recently, more social movements aimed at empowering the victims of sexual harassment and assault to speak out have been gaining the attention of the popular press. This includes the aforementioned #MeToo movement, as well as the newer Time's Up movement.

I am a 21-year-old female who has spent the last 4 years on a college campus. I have witnessed sexism in its bold and hostile form as well as in its quieter, yet equally troubling benevolent form. I will be attending the University of Texas School of Law in the August 2018 to become a future attorney. I want to protect the rights of others and will most certainly be spending a large amount of time repeatedly reading court documents in the pursuit of this. I am intrinsically invested in the completion of this thesis.

This study aims to analyze how the ambivalent sexism is displaying within a court setting. Specifically, this study will look at the People v. Turner court case. Female portrayals in various forms of media have been analyzed extensively due to the gender-role stereotypes that are often maintained. The topic of research that I am proposing requires further analysis because there has not been sufficient research conducted in regard to portrayals of female gender roles in the legal system. This is especially true regarding the theory of ambivalent sexism. It is important to understand all aspects of sexism in order to be able to effectively work towards gender equality. This why we need to conduct more research and draw more attention to it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The introduction to gender roles is a highly significant part of the socialization process in modern society. There is a clear-cut distinction between what are considered to be acceptable behaviors for both men and women to adhere to in society, and these particular roles shape their orientations to life. Sexism arises through the relationship between both genders and most often targets women (Glick and Fiske 1996: 491). The following sections will provide an overview of ambivalent sexism to better understand a discussion of gender roles within relationships or more specifically, how opposite sides within a court case exhibit patterns of ambivalent sexism throughout the *People v. Turner* case.

Gender roles and sexism are two thoroughly researched and discussed topics within the sociological realm. A less discussed, and increasingly relevant topic of research is ambivalent sexism. The theory of ambivalent sexism is composed of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism aimed at women, and was first introduced by Peter Glick and Susan T. Fisk in 1996. Hostile sexism is considered to be aggressively prejudiced attitudes and acts, such as sexual harassment. Benevolent sexism is defined as sexist attitudes that may be perceived to be positive, but employ a stereotypical view of women being dependent upon men (Glick and Fiske 1996: 491-92). An important part of ambivalent sexism is paternalism and the various ways it is portrayed. Paternalism is highlighted in three forms: dominative paternalism, protective paternalism, and paternalistic chivalry (Glick and Fiske 1996; Vicki, Abrams, and Hutchison 2003). The three variations of paternalism describe men as being considerate and protective towards women, while placing restrictions on what women should do and how they should act

(Glick and Fiske 1996; Vicki et al. 2003). Vicki, Abrams, and Hutchison (2003) proposed and concluded that benevolent sexism is related to higher paternalistic chivalry. Glick and Fiske created the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) as a measure of ambivalent sexism which proved to be a reliable measure through their study. The ASI has been used as the standard measuring tool in other research studies (Glick and Fiske 1996: 495).

Ambivalent sexism is enacted by men and internalized by women. In a study conducted by Fields, Swan, and Kloos (2009), researchers asked 78 female college students to write an essay on what it means to be a woman, and then analyzed the essays and compared it to ASI scores. Almost all of the essays contained themes of ambivalent sexism when asked about their experiences of being a woman. In fact, the majority of women were accepting of benevolent sexism over hostile sexism (Fields et al. 2009: 559). Researchers Moya, Glick, Expósito, De Lemus, and Hart (2007) focused their study on women's responses to benevolent sexism in different studies. Findings showed that women react differently to benevolent sexism depending on who it comes from. In their first study, women were given restrictions by husbands and by coworkers. If the restriction was placed under protective pretenses by their husbands, they were more accepting of it, but they were not as receptive to it if it was received from a coworker (Moya et al. 2007: 1425). The next two studies that were conducted by Moya and her colleagues built upon the findings from their first study to reduce the chances of other possibilities playing a role in the findings. What does these studies show? The existence of an intimate relationship should not be the deciding factor in whether women perceive benevolent sexism to be a problem or not. Women agree with benevolent sexism because of the positive associations placed with being protected or taken care of (Fields et al.

2009; Moya et al. 2007).

Moreover, the literature on benevolent sexism shows that in certain contexts women become complicit in ambivalent sexism as a number of women anticipate and require paternalistic behavior from men. The study conducted by Sarlet, Dumont, Delacollette, and Dardenne in 2012 studied under what circumstances women expected protective paternalism, as a form of benevolent sexism, from men. Both women and men repeatedly responded that men in romantic relationships should show protective paternalism, rather than men in the context of work relationships (Sarlet et al. 2012). Women and men approved of sexist attitudes under the idea of protective paternalism as a form of intimacy within romantic relationships. This creates a problem when analyzing certain social issues. A prime example of this can be seen in the study conducted by Abrams, Viki, Masser, and Bohner in 2003. It has become commonplace to hear about the acceptance of rape myths, or views that blame the victim, rather than the offender, and make light of the violence that occurred (Abrams et al. 2003: 111). The purpose of this study was to see if benevolent sexism was related to personal responses to female rape victims. In the study, participants were tested using the ASI and given a scenario to read that described a situation in which either acquaintance rape or stranger rape occurred. Through a series of measures, participants were then assessed to see to what extent they held the victim responsible (Pp. 115). In general, the participants that received a high score in benevolent sexism were more likely to blame the rape victim in acquaintance rape scenarios because they believe that the victim behaved inappropriately as a woman (Pp. 122).

Ambivalent sexism remains a largely unexplored theory that combines elements

of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is perceived to be positive, but, if viewed critically, can be identified as socially problematic. Previous studies have found that women are more likely to accept benevolent sexism in romantic relationships than within work relationships. Men and women both expect benevolent sexism to occur in romantic relationships, as it is seen as a form of intimacy. Ambivalent sexism is a large issue that has not been given enough consideration. The goal of the research will be to add to the current information regarding ambivalent sexism, while analyzing women's interactions and to promote further research.

III. BACKGROUND

Brock Turner was a 19-year-old swimmer at Stanford University. On January 18, 2015, he was accused of assaulting a 22-year-old female who was visiting her sister at the university. This female is referred to as Jane Doe throughout the court case to protect her identity. Jane Doe and her sister attended a party at a fraternity house and were subsequently separated from each other at some point throughout the party. Jane Doe was found lying unconscious behind a dumpster by two graduate students who happened to pass by on their bikes while the assault was occurring. These two witnesses apprehended Brock Turner until the police showed up and arrested Turner.

Brock Turner was charged with three separate felony counts of sexual assault. In Count 1, he was charged with Assault with intent to commit rape of an intoxicated person or unconscious person. In Count 2, he was charged with sexual penetration of a person while that person was intoxicated. He was charged in Count 3 for sexual penetration of a person who was unconscious of the nature. After a long trial, he was unanimously sentenced as guilty by the jury.

The jury found Brock Turner guilty on all three counts of felony sexual assault on March 30, 2016. Once he went to trial for sentencing, recommendations were made by several concerned people in the form of letters. Ultimately, he was sentenced to 6 months in jail and 3 years of probation by Judge Persky on June 2, 2016.

IV. DATA AND METHODS

In this research project I used an unobtrusive method of research to analyze text data. More specifically, this study uses content analysis to examine the People v. Turner court case letters. The process of content analysis uses data that are non-interactive and exists independently of the research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011: 228). I conducted a content analysis of the letters addressed to the Judge presiding over the case and submitted to the court. These letters were written by a variety of people, including the victim, the defendant, their family members, and friends. In this study I used purposive sampling techniques by focusing only on the interactions during the court proceedings that relate to ambivalent sexism.

I chose to study the People v. Turner court documents because it was one of the earliest sexual assault cases that was so heavily broadcasted. It was a case that gained national attention very quickly. Several letters were sent on behalf of the defendant as well as the plaintiff. 40 letters were sent on behalf of the plaintiff, and 5 letters were sent on behalf of the victim. These letters were sent not only from individuals familiar with those directly involved in the case, but also from concerned bystanders who felt that it was necessary to voice their opinion for or against a certain outcome in the case. The case involved Brock Turner who was the defendant and an unnamed female. The unnamed female is referred to as Jane Doe in the court documents.

I analyzed all of the letters submitted to the court which were taken under advisement before the Judge issued his sentence ruling. This consisted of 45 letters, each of various page lengths. I evaluated each of the interactions by taking note of exact wording that was used by each party and what expectations were set regarding the

sentencing. From the interactions and the evaluations, I looked for any discernable patterns that arose. The patterns that appeared showed how ambivalent sexism was portrayed within a legal setting, specific to this court case.

I used both an inductive and deductive approach when analyzing the court records. In an inductive approach, a grounded theory is applied. In other words, I allowed themes to emerge from the data. In a deductive approach, a theory is applied to the data collected. My prior research on the theory of ambivalent sexism in a television series has influenced my desire to focus on this theory in other mediums within society.

Although the study was done to the best of my ability, it is important to acknowledge the possible limitations of the study. The first limitation is that while examples of ambivalent sexism may be present in the *People v. Turner* court case, the case is only a single instance which may make the findings ungeneralizable to all legal settings. This limitation could be corrected by further research being conducted on more studies. The second limitation is that no other methodology was used, such as focus groups, to further validate the findings.

V. ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how patterns of ambivalent sexism are exhibited within a court setting. In order to accomplish this, I dissected the letters submitted to the court during the People v. Turner court sentencing hearing for descriptions and wording. Once I analyzed all of the letters submitted for the defense and prosecution, I purposefully selected quotes from various letters to include within the findings. These quotes should illustrate the themes found. The analysis will help connect the theory of ambivalent sexism to a legal setting, and more specifically, the case of People v. Turner.

From the analysis, two important themes became clear. The first theme in the letters was the celebration of “boys being boys.” This is done by three means. First, the purposeful inclusion of adjectives that emphasized Brock Turner’s description as a gentle man, unlike the stereotypical tough man. The second aspect demonstrated in the letters was that Brock Turner’s potential to contribute to positively to society after the crime should be reason to lessen his punishment from being sentenced to jail to being put on probation. The third aspect was that throughout the letters, Brock Turner’s athletic abilities are mentioned as a reason for the judge to practice leniency during his sentencing.

The second major theme is that by the act of individuals “protecting” Jane Doe, they are themselves perpetuating ambivalent sexism as well. This is also done by three means. The first is the blame and guilt associated with alcohol consumption. The second is the recurring regret expressed by those who wished they could have protected Jane Doe. The third aspect is the diminishing of women in society who have encountered

ambivalent sexism through reducing individual voices and using patronizing language in reference to women.

The two main themes that emerged from the data reflect the theory of ambivalent sexism which is the culmination of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism targeting women. Below I will discuss each theme to allow readers to view the case, *People v. Turner*, with a critical lens.

Celebrating “Boys Being Boys”

The primary finding of the first theme is that the majority of the letters sent on behalf of Brock Turner, describe the defendant as gentle and calm. This is particularly interesting, because this is not usually how males are described in our society. This is especially not how one would expect to be described after having been convicted of a violent crime. Words such as “quiet,” “humble,” and “hard-working” are often used. For example, his older sister, Caroline, describes him in her letter as “...a kind, quiet, talented, hard-working, deeply caring, sensitive, peculiar, inquisitive, and most importantly, vulnerable young man” (*People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9)*: 1). His high school guidance counselor, Kelly Owens, wrote that she “...found him to be a quiet, reserved young man who led by his actions more than his words” (*People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9)*: 4). This is a clear form of benevolent sexism.

In this case, the contradiction of the typically rough stereotypes that males are assigned is seen as a reason for leniency. Males are typically described as strong, unemotional, aggressive, and self-confident. His previous swimming coach, Stephen Wilholt, wrote in his letter, “In all the years I have known Brock and watched him interact with peers and adults, he has never been anything but kind, thoughtful, humble,

and supportive of others” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 5). An old friend, Tommy Cope wrote, “At first, I did not really know him well at all; he is a very shy and soft-spoken individual...Brock is a mild-mannered kid with a good heart in a terrible, terrible situation” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 6). Again, it is clear that despite being found guilty of three counts of sexual assault, people still consider Turner to be “mild-mannered, which is an ironic contradiction of the adjective.

Those who wrote these letters on behalf of Brock Turner seem to believe that because their personal interactions with Turner did not reflect the potential for violence or assault, that he either must not have done it or should not be punished as harshly due to his usual gentle demeanor. Turner’s family friend and current boss, Jeff Coudron, wrote, “... my only dealings with Brock were a few emails but it was clear that he was humble, smart, talented and had a great future in front of him” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 8). In this instance, someone who has only dealt with Brock a few times, and never in person, believes that he already has a well-informed opinion of Brock and can speak to his character. This is extremely problematic because it challenges the victim’s credibility in this sensitive situation. When the perpetrator is continuously described in such positive terms regardless of their actions, then the feelings of those who have been made into victims are no longer validated. It is obvious that victims in these situations do not view their assailant positively. By some means, others with an auxiliary position in the situation maintain their position that the assailant is docile, and gentle even after being ruled guilty.

Despite the verdict of guilty, Brock is still considered innocent by those that he knew. His old friend, Leslie Rasmussen, writes, “I think this is all a huge

misunderstanding. I think that the bikers who found him did the right thing by keeping him there in case he was attempting rape, but that after the investigation, it should have found Brock to be innocent... I would not be writing this letter if I had any doubt in my mind that he is innocent” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 41). Kelly Owens also wrote in her letter, “In spite of what was said about him during that time [the trial], what I know to be true is that he is a young man of character, integrity, possesses great love and respect for his parents, honors his friends, seeks opportunities to help others, and is absolutely undeserving of the outcome” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 4). Wording such as “misunderstanding” and “undeserving of the outcome” serves a damaging purpose. Brock Turner, despite being found guilty, still holds the benefit of the doubt in many people’s perspective. He is not being held accountable for his actions, even after a court of law has determined that he did sexually assault an unconscious woman.

The letters sent in Brock Turner’s behalf share the sentiment that he should be excused from any serious consequences during sentencing because of his potential to contribute positively to society. Brock Turner and his attorney argue that he would be more beneficial to society if he were sentenced to probation so he would be able to start a program bringing awareness to the dangers of alcohol, rather than be sentenced to serve time in prison. His high school coach, Kevin Weldon asks that Judge Persky will consider “... all of the good Brock has accomplished in his life, as well as all that he can give back to society if given a second chance” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 42). Brock Turner’s family and friends argue for leniency on the basis that he has been good in the past and may do good in the future.

Legal cases set a precedent for future court proceedings. Sexual assault of an

unconscious person is a serious crime, but the sentencing of this case could determine how future cases similar to this one are handled. A letter sent in on behalf of the prosecution says, "... a person who has been convicted of praying upon an incapacitated person for their own sexual gratification must receive more than a slap on the wrist" (People v. Brock Allen Turner (7/9): 62). It is obvious that those who send letters in support of Brock will argue for a lesser sentence and those who send letters in support of the victim will argue for a harsher sentence. The prosecutor argued for a 6-year sentence in a state prison. Ultimately, he was sentenced to 6 months in a county jail and 3 years of probation afterwards.

Throughout these letters, the sexual assault is described as an unfortunate situation or a poor decision. The gravity of the situation is reduced through wording such as this. This is a serious problem within our society when discussing sexism. An example of this is shown with Turner's old friend, Anne Whalen, who wrote "I hope that he can get back to normal and return to being a contributing member of society as soon as possible after this unfortunate situation" (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 7). Turner's family friend and boss, Jeff Coudron, wrote "The thought of a possible jail sentence seems a terrible mistake when considering all that Brock can contribute... Yes, he made some bad decisions that one night, but to think that such a talented, young, intellectual young man with so much potential would have to go spend time in jail is very saddening" (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 8). These two excerpts from the letters exemplify the great degree to which supporters of Turner are lessening the severity of the assault.

Brock Turner's high school assistant coach, Meghan Olson goes as far as to write that she "... can see no benefit to the victim, or to society to sentence Brock to jail time.

In spite of one night of alcohol-induced poor decision making, Brock... can unquestionably make a significantly meaningful contribution to society given a second chance” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9):27). In our society, sexual assault is not often taken seriously enough. Those who are survivors are victimized and villainized provided they have enough courage to actually report the assault and seek justice. The victim would benefit from sentencing Brock to jail time because it would provide a sense of fairness in our legal system. It would also give the victim a sense of security knowing that what happened to her will not be able to happen to others during Turner’s stay in prison. Our society would benefit from sentencing Brock to jail time because it would serve as an example to others that actions do have consequences regardless of someone’s previous achievements, gender, race, or status.

It is not logical to diminish three counts of felony sexual assault to simply a poor decision that was made. In Brock Turner’s letter he writes, “My poor decision making and excessive drinking hurt someone that night...” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (8/9): 43). Turner’s father goes so far as to say that because Brock’s “... life will never be the one he dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve” he should not be incarcerated. His father views incarceration as, “... a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years of life...” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 50). His father extremely minimizes the seriousness of the assault and the ramifications of his son’s actions by describing it as action. Sexual assault has both immediate and delayed consequences to the victim. The victim wrote in her statement, “I was pummeled with narrowed, pointed questions that dissected my personal life, love life, past life, family life, inane questions, accumulating trivial details to try and find an excuse for this guy who didn’t even take the

time to ask me for my name, who had me naked a handful of minutes after seeing me” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (7/9): 50).

In many of the letters sent on Turner’s behalf, the first thing that is mentioned is his athletic ability. Brock Turner’s athletic abilities are cited as a reason for leniency. Not only is it the first thing mentioned, in many of the letters, it is the aspect of Brock that is most mentioned. Brock Turner began swimming at a young age. He was a talented swimmer who broke many records during his high school career. He later received a scholarship to swim at Stanford University. His previous swimming coach, Stephen Wilholt, wrote, “Early on it became clear that Brock is a gifted athlete. He worked incredibly hard over the years to become the best high school swimmer in the state of Ohio and one of the best in the country” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 5).

His adept athleticism seems to be an arbitrary thing to mention within letters advocating for a lesser sentence. In the victim’s statement she mentions, “At the bottom of the article, after I learned about the graphic details of my own sexual assault, the article listed his swimming times ... I think the end is where you list your extracurriculars to cancel out all the sickening things that’ve happened” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (7/9): 49). This is an interesting point that may be attributed to gender roles. As mentioned earlier, males are stereotyped to be strong and tough. Oftentimes, this includes athletic abilities. However, this should not be seen as a reason to excuse other behaviors, especially something as detrimental as sexual assault.

Brock Turner’s old friend, Tommy Cope, writes in his letter that, “His sport, his education, his goals have already been taken from him” (People v. Brock Allen Turner (9/9): 6). Losing his ability to swim competitively for Stanford University is considered

to be enough of a punishment after being found guilty of sexual assault. This fails to take into account the effect that the sexual assault has had on the victim. Brock Turner is not the only person in this situation who has lost things that he valued. The victims in these situations inevitably lose a sense of security, self-confidence, and often have damaged emotional and mental health. The perpetrator of an assault should face consequences, but that is not often the case.

Whether this is due to athleticism or another factor cannot be clear. In the victim's statement, she wrote, "The fact that Brock was a star athlete at a prestigious university should not be seen as an entitlement to leniency, but as an opportunity to send a strong cultural message that sexual assault is against the law regardless of social class" (*People v. Brock Allen Turner (7/9)*: 57). This strongly exemplifies the issues that are brought by the frequent mention of Brock Turner's athletic abilities in each of the letters submitted.

"Protecting" Jane Doe

Those who write on Jane Doe's behalf also display ambivalent sexism. This may seem counterintuitive, or even unlikely, but ambivalent sexism can be seen in many forms. It is often expressed by most individuals even without realizing it. While there were only 5 letters analyzed on behalf of Jane Doe, aspects of ambivalent sexism still appeared.

One letter written by the best friend of Jane Doe's sister expresses guilt for drinking alcohol after Jane Doe's assault and a newly developed fear of drinking too much. She states in her letter, "I feel guilty for continuing to drink. I feel guilty for continuing to go to campus parties... I have an intense fear of getting too drunk" (*People v. Brock Allen Turner (7/9)*: 61). By maintaining this idea, this friend is also diminishing

the responsibility of Brock Turner's actions. Rather than only discuss that the assault should not have happened at all that night, regardless of alcohol, she is put in a state of fear that it might happen to her as well. She is helping to spread the idea that if Jane Doe had less or no alcohol in her system, then the assault may have been preventable. Alcohol is not culpable for sexual assault in any situation, but that is not made clear in many cases. Women and men alike should not fear alcohol consumption or feel guilty for consuming it as it does not cause sexual assault to occur. The society that we reside within encourages the thought that females must monitor their alcohol levels to prevent sexual assault from occurring later on.

Another issue within this theme is the guilt felt by Jane Doe's sister for not protecting Jane Doe. Jane Doe's sister feels like she should have protected Jane Doe, but she should not need to be protected in order to prevent rape. Jane Doe's sister states "I realized that the reason I could not find her that night, after checking every room in the fraternity house, after yelling her name outside, was because she had been unconscious and hidden behind a dumpster... I am still sad that I was not there to protect her" (People v. Brock Allen Turner (7/9): 59). This portrays the detrimental belief that females should be protected at all times in order to prevent being assaulted. It also further perpetuates the idea that women are fragile. The sister of Jane Doe blames herself for the assault, despite no longer being in the same location as her sister. This takes the responsibility away from the assailant, Brock Turner.

Jane Doe speaks on behalf of other females, which diminishes their individual importance. In her letter she states, "And finally, to girls everywhere, I am with you... I hope that by speaking today, you absorbed a small amount of light..." Her individual

experience, while problematic and tragic, is not reflective of the whole problem experienced by many in regard to sexual violence and discrimination. By speaking on for other women she is no longer allowing each person to tell their individual stories. She is claiming that she can sum up their experiences through hers. Jane Doe also, interestingly, uses the word “girls” rather than females or women in her statement. In her attempt to speak for everyone else, she is also patronizing other women and reducing them to be “girls.” This is the epitome of ironic ambivalent sexism. Jane Doe herself is continuing the patterns of ambivalent sexism while trying to speak out against Brock Turner’s actions against her.

VI. DISCUSSION

It is clear that two things are happening throughout these letters. First, Brock Turner is being excused for the assault. Second, the woman who he sexually assaulted is taken away from her agency. By excusing Brock Turner's actions and deeming Jane Doe as frail, we perpetuate ambivalent sexism and all of the negative side effects it can have. While this particular analysis deals with a specific court case and specific individuals involved, examples of ambivalent sexism can be seen throughout society. It is truly imperative that members of society learn to recognize this form of sexism in others and within themselves. Once this is done, our society may be able to take visible steps towards gender equality.

It is not illogical that the various individuals who wrote letters on Brock Turner's behalf advocated for leniency during his sentencing. It becomes problematic when his supporters go to the extreme of completely excusing his actions. They do this by diminishing the severity of his assault of Jane Doe. His father goes beyond victim blaming, by dismissing that the assault happened at all. His father famously and grotesquely described it as "20 minutes of action." This is how he expects others to view the actions of that night. This is how members of our society normalize and rationalize violence against people.

It is important that we, as a society, become more aware of the problematic ways we use to describe others and the words that are used in everyday language. Words are very powerful tools and weapons. We need to find new ways to talk about sex, gender roles, rape, sexual assault, and crimes against people.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze how letters submitted in a court hearing exhibit patterns of ambivalent sexism in the *People v. Turner* court case. The study was inspired by my previous research on ambivalent sexism in the television series, *Breaking Bad*. The analysis of 45 letters written on behalf of the plaintiff and the defendant throughout the sentencing hearing exposed two major patterns. The two patterns can be understood by the examples included in the analysis, as well as by reading through the letters submitted to the court.

My topic and research for my thesis is coming during a time when the general public is starting to become more aware of the prevalence of sexism in the routine aspects of daily lives. This awareness is largely due to the *People v. Turner* court case. This has translated into social movements such as #MeToo, and has led to an increase in public outcry against sexual discrimination and violence. Through a content analysis of the letters submitted in the court case, *People v. Turner*, the patterns that emerged were all key components of the theory of ambivalent sexism.

The first theme in the letters submitted was that Brock Turner's actions were excused. This can be seen in the language used, such as adjectives that emphasized Brock Turner's description as a gentle man, unlike the stereotypical tough man in the letters received by the court on his behalf. He is ironically described as quiet, and mild-mannered despite having been found guilty of three counts of felony sexual assault. The second characteristic in the letters was that Brock Turner's potential to contribute to society through alcohol danger awareness programs should lead to a reduction in punishment. The argument is that because of Turner's ability and desire to give back to

society, this should reduce his punishment from being sentenced to years in jail to being put on probation. The third characteristic was that throughout the letters, Brock Turner's advanced athleticism is often mentioned. His talent as a strong swimmer is seen as a reason to pardon his actions the night of the assault.

The second theme in the letters submitted was that while trying to protect Jane Doe, the very same people contributed to the problems associated with ambivalent sexism. The first aspect within this theme is the idea of blaming alcohol and fearing alcohol rather than placing the blame on the assailant, Brock Turner. The second aspect is the feeling of guilt associated with not being capable of protecting Jane Doe from the assault. The third aspect of this theme is the problem Jane Doe exhibits within her letter by speaking for other females who have gone through similar negative sexual experiences.

Overall, ambivalent sexism is problematic in its entirety. Breaking the theory apart serves to further discover the harmful components. Once we gain an understanding of the theory, we are able to view experiences with a new perspective. At the core of the theory, there are power struggles, traditional gender roles, and a belief in patriarchy. Through a content analysis of the court case, *People v. Turner*, the patterns that emerged were all key components of the theory of ambivalent sexism. Further research on ambivalent sexism should be conducted in order to gain more understanding and bring awareness to the theory and its problems, especially in today's society.

As explained before, sexual harassment, sexual assault, marital rape, and cat calls are just some of the many forms that hostile sexism can take place. Hostile sexism is more easily understood because it is what members of society are accustomed to noticing.

Benevolent sexism can occur when women are forced into certain roles due to stereotypes of being more motherly, nurturing, emotional, compassionate, or intuitive. Benevolent sexism is harder to be aware of because of the positive feelings it is associated with while it is happening. It is benevolent sexism that leads to the problematic, aggressive, hostile sexism.

Sexism today is much more insidious than ever before, and paying attention to discourse and how we describe, discuss, and speak of reality, creates reality. Words matter and they have long lasting material consequences. As long as we continue to talk about men, women, sex, rape, and sexuality in this way, we will continue to perpetuate sexism.

Further research on ambivalent sexism should be conducted in order to gain more understanding and bring awareness to the theory and its problems, especially in today's society. If members in society could be made aware of the importance of the words they use and the effects they can have later on, then it may be possible to effectively change the conversation.

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