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The Johnny Depp and Amber Heard case in news media: A Critical Discourse Analysis.

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Abstract

This paper presents a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard case in news media. The aim of the current research is to allow for an in-depth analysis of how a range of news media outlets used discourse to frame Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in modern news media. A synthesis of previous literature revealed methodological limitations and a potential research bias in the existing body of research addressing news media discourse regarding IPV. The current study utilized a sample of 12 articles from three news media outlets of distinct political orientations, that were analyzed following guidelines on maintaining quality in CDA. Two discursive strategies are presented in this paper: 1) Predication and argumentation; 2) The construction of ingroups and outgroups. This paper argues that these strategies were used to discredit the experience of Depp and create perceived ingroups and outgroups throughout the discourse. It is also noted that this sample of articles only highlighted instances of physical violence. Future research should investigate the effect this representation of IPV may have on consumers of news media, as societal expectations may inform help-seeking.

Keywords: IPV, CDA, Predication, argumentation, outgroups, ingroups, functionalisation.

The Johnny Depp and Amber Heard case in news media: A Critical Discourse Analysis.

In the United Kingdom (UK), The Crown Prosecution Service (2021) defines intimate partner violence (IPV) as “Any behavior deployed by an offender to obtain control or power over another, and we recognize that emotional abuse can be just as harmful as physical violence”. For the year ending March 2020, the Office of National Statistics (ONS; 2020) reported that 2.3 million adults in England and Wales (1.6 million women and 757,000 men) had experienced IPV. Of these, only 59% of cases were recorded as a domestic abuse related crime (ONS, 2020). Despite the use of such gender neutral definitions and figures suggesting a prevalence of male victims, the policy and guidance is still often framed in a way that positions IPV as a gendered crime of men’s violence to women and means some victim groups are under represented in services. For example, Safelives Insights data published in the ONS (2018) report showed only 4% of victims accessing specialist referral services were men. The same data revealed that only 5% of the cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) were men, and another source evidenced that less than 1% of referrals to MARAC are men and women from same-sex relationships (Donovan, 2010). These figures do not equate to the prevalence rates we know exist for these different groups and have as a consequence some scholars have called for legislation and policy to be “inclusive in both ‘name and spirit’” (Bates & Douglas, 2020; p.370).

Furthermore, in recognizing the complexity of IPV, it is also important to acknowledge that it is not always physical but can involve a range of words and non-physical actions used with the purpose to manipulate, hurt, weaken or frighten a person mentally and emotionally (Gormley & Lopez, 2010). To illustrate this, statistics from ONS (2020) revealed that 72.6% of women and 57% of men experienced psychological/ emotional abuse during their abusive relationship. Once again, this further highlights the prevalence of female perpetration (Archer, 2000; Dutton, 2010; Bates et al., 2014). Indeed, the current gendered framing of IPV is at odds with a now significant body of literature that highlights men’s experiences of IPV (Bates, 2020; Morgan & Wells, 2016), experiences within the LGBTQ+ community

(Laskey et al. 2019), as well as the similarity in motivations and risk factors between different perpetrator groups (Capaldi et al., 2012). These victim groups would have otherwise been identified as the collective 'outgroup' as they work against the gender paradigm (Nguyen & Naugle, 2019).

Despite this evidence, the mainstream narrative around IPV is still considered to be gendered (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, 2004; Nguyen & Naugle, 2019). During the second wave feminist movement, Dobash and Dobash (1979) aimed to spread awareness of IPV occurring in the home, with the goal of tackling issues such as 'wife abuse' and marital rape. Despite such efforts, it is noted that news media was largely 'uninterested' and 'unsympathetic' towards issues of IPV during this time period (Easteal et al., 2015). Rhode (1995) suggested this was due to female journalists lacking "the critical mass and professional leverage to ensure systematic and evenhanded treatment of gender-related issues" (p. 686). However, it could be argued that this lack of coverage resulted from a lack of technological advancements and 'reach' in news media (Martens et al., 2018). More recently, social media movements such as the '#metoo' and '#maybedoesnthityou', have influenced mainstream news media (Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). These movements aim to increase awareness of gendered IPV in the public, as well as to provide social commentary on societal systems that uphold gender inequality (Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). Bogen et al. (2019) calls attention to the benefits of these movements in their ability to create a support forum for survivors of Violence Against Women, enabling them to share their own experiences.

Media discourse can have a profound influence on public perceptions of social issues, such as IPV (Smith et al., 2019). These media movements for female survivors have proven to be beneficial, however, the current representation of IPV in news media does not come without critique. For example, Mack and McCann (2018) highlight that while '#metoo' survivors have the platform to speak up, other marginalized 'outgroups' (for example, male survivors and sex workers) may not out of fear of being criminalized or facing further victimization and stigma. This example begins to illustrate the power that

news media discourse can have on attitudes towards IPV and help-seeking behaviors in marginalized groups. Linking directly to IPV, Overstreet and Quinn (2013) propose a stigmatization model that highlights three components that can influence perceived victimhood. Cultural stigma highlights societal beliefs, discrediting experienced abuse. Stigma internalization involves the negative beliefs people have about those who experience IPV. Anticipated stigma emphasizes concern about what will happen once others know about the partner abuse (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). Where victimhood can be perceived as a stigmatized identity, this is only exacerbated for other 'outgroups' who do not fit this gendered portrayal of IPV (Bates, 2020; Laskey et al., 2019; Morgan & Wells, 2016). The stigma that still exists around IPV generally, but particularly for these "outgroups" is often promulgated by the gendered stereotype that still exist within society, which can then be further exacerbated by media discourse.

Contrary to what the '#metoo' movement represents, there is a body of literature to suggest news media constructs IPV within a 'patriarchal framework' which portrays and constructs men's violence against women as a societal norm (Leung, 2019; Michelle & Weaver, 2003; Smith et al., 2019). Smith et al. (2019) employed a content analysis of the representation of IPV in news media articles in Queensland, Australia. The authors also reported that abuser sympathizing discourse was prominent in 45% of articles, utilizing language such as "Good man" and "Has family/club support" Further noting that news media was ignoring the social importance and context of IPV and furthermore seems to be reinforcing patriarchal attitudes (Smith et al., 2019, p. 581). The authors suggest news media would benefit from greater awareness of the gendered nature of IPV with the aim to increase the condemnation of men's violence against women (Smith et al., 2019). Easteal et al. (2015) drew similar conclusions and identified a recurring theme of "mutuality of responsibility" for perpetration of violence and stated: "These problematic representations have a profound effect on how perpetrators and the wider community perceive violence against women." (pp. 111-112). Other research using discourse or

content analysis tends to exclusively focus on the portrayal of female victim groups in news media (Leung, 2019) leaving other victim groups, particularly male victims of IPV neglected.

Easteal et al. (2015) and Smith et al. (2019) employ a solely feminist perspective. In doing so, both fail to recognize or consider other victimized groups of IPV (e.g. male victims) (Bates, 2020; Mack & McCann, 2018). Moreover, in building their case towards a need for a gendered societal perception of IPV, Easteal et al. (2015) and Smith et al. (2019) rely on outdated theory and literature, regarding women being portrayed as 'ideal victims' and 'whores' (Benedict, 1992; Mackinnon, 1982). The authors suggest that these narrative representations may be perpetuating societal myths about violence against women and may have an impact on 'female victims' accessing justice (Easteal et al., 2015). Conversely, recent research suggests that societal norms mean we do not tolerate the use of violence in intimate relationships, especially violence that is perpetrated by men against women (Bartholomew et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2016; Dutton, 2010). This reliance on outdated literature, theory and the previously identified failure to recognize other marginalized outgroups may imply a bias in the research agendas (King et al., 2017; Lloyd & Ramon, 2017). It is therefore argued that recent portrayal of IPV in news media should be investigated using a theoretical and analytical framework which is rooted in tackling issues of societal justice and themes of power.

The current synthesis of the literature revealed that recent papers commonly used content analysis and narrative literature reviews to analyze and explore the representation of IPV in news media (Kelly & Payton, 2018; Moffitt et al., 2013; Rolle et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Although narrative reviews allow for a generally comprehensive coverage of the topic, the method suffers from a lack of systematic selection of articles/studies, possibly resulting in a biased interpretation (Allen, 2017). Content analysis is systematic in nature, although it can often disregard the context in which the article was produced (Maier, 2017). Importantly, if IPV is to be viewed within a societal context as the literature suggests, it could be beneficial to employ a method such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that is

rooted in considering how societal issues and issues of power can be deployed through language use (Fairclough, 2013). Therefore, this paper aims to examine news media using CDA approach.

Recently within news media, the libel court case between Johnny Depp and the publisher of *The Sun* newspaper has highlighted several past allegations of violence between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. Depp's case was that the article made defamatory allegations such as 'wife-beater' which implied Depp was guilty of serious domestic violence against Heard (Antoniou, 2020). The case was concluded on 2 November 2020, with the court ruling that the words *The Sun* used were legally acceptable (Antoniou, 2020). The representation of this case in news media was selected to be subject to a CDA (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). This is primarily due to the case being inherently embedded in issues of power and social context, with Depp and Heard being Hollywood actors and within the public eye (Fairclough, 2013; Regmi, 2017). Furthermore, in this case, both Heard and Depp have alleged occurrences of IPV against one another. Recent research has highlighted a gendered paradigm within the societal context of IPV (Bartholomew et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2016; Dutton, 2010) therefore we argue it is essential to investigate whether this paradigm influences the portrayal of IPV in news media. Therefore, this case represents an opportunity to investigate how the potential multifaceted nature of IPV is represented in the news media discourse.

Whilst there is a recognition that addressing violence against women is an essential topic of discussion, in doing this, researchers fail to acknowledge the potential multifaceted nature of IPV and the consideration of other marginalized outgroups experiencing IPV, particularly male victims (Bates, 2020; Capaldi, 2012; Laskey, 2019; Morgan & Wells, 2016). Therefore, the present research aims to analyze news media portrayals of IPV, utilizing CDA as it is grounded in exploring societal issues and power using language (Fairclough, 2013). The aim is that this analysis will allow for an in-depth conceptualization of how a range of news media outlets use discourse to frame IPV in current news media.

Method

Design

The purpose of the current research project is to explore the representation of IPV in news media. IPV is a recognized societal issue that affects many different groups (Ali et al., 2016; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012; Mack & McCann, 2018; Nowinski & Bowen, 2012). Furthermore, there is a recognition that News Media may have certain political or ideological agendas and importantly, holds the potential to influence public perception (King et al., 2017; Lloyd & Ramon, 2017; Mack & McCann, 2018; Smith et al., 2019) Therefore, the methodology here will inherently focus on the use of language within news media text in order to analyze the ideological goals they may serve. As such it is crucial to employ a qualitative framework and analytical methodology that focuses on the social construction of power and ideology through discourse (Fairclough, 2013). CDA was deemed the most appropriate method of analysis, as it focuses less on the descriptive goals employed by some other schools of Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Instead, CDA focuses on detailing linguistic features and how and why these are used and what possible ideological goals they might serve (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Also, as the roots of CDA lie in concepts of text linguistics and rhetoric, it is deemed the more appropriate method to explore news media discourse, compared to for example the Discursive Action Model (DAM), which is more suited to focusing on actions within conversation and interaction rather than text linguistics (Potter, 2013). Within a CDA approach, language in text can be utilized to represent a position, belief or idea around a subject (Mogashoa, 2014)

As is congruent with a discourse analysis approach, it is important to be reflexive and transparent regarding the epistemological underpinnings of the methodology and process of analysis (O'Reilly et al., 2020). In CDA specifically however, "Critical Discourse Analysts themselves point out, there is no single, homogenous version of CDA" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 5). Perhaps due to the heterogenous nature of CDA, ontological and epistemological underpinnings are rarely explored or

elaborated on within CDA research and the wider literature, yet these underpinnings are considered important to allow researchers to take a more nuanced perspective in focusing on social issues such as power and oppression (Regmi, 2017). As such, this research takes on a social constructivist stance, as with any discursive approach, it is assumed that knowledge and various psychological phenomena are constructed, understood, and displayed through discourse (Fairclough, 2013; Potter, 2013). Specifically, the current research adopts a more macro-constructionist position which assumes the existence of pre-existing socio-political constructs such as power and oppression (O'Reilly et al., 2020). In the case of the current research, this approach is deemed ideal for exploring a controversial social issue such as IPV. A common philosophical stance in the CDA literature is that it recognizes that oppression, control and power, that operate tacitly in a wider setting, can be investigated through analyzing discourse (Regmi, 2017). Furthermore, Fairclough (2013) highlights that CDA can be applied as a framework for analyzing controversial 'social problems', specifically those that are contested.

Sample

CDA typically analyses news text, political speeches, and advertisement that at first appear neutral but in fact could be ideological and seek to shape the representation of individuals and events (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Prominent in the news media, at the time of writing, were the allegations of abuse between Amber Heard and Johnny Depp. As CDA is rooted in considering how societal issues and issues of power can be influenced through language use (Fairclough, 2013), utilizing the articles centralized around a case as "politically interesting" as this (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 207) seemed ideal. Research suggests the involvement of celebrities in news media can have an influential effect on public perceptions surrounding a topic (Kosenko et al., 2016). For example, in 2013, Angelina Jolie announced that she had had a genetic test that revealed a BRCA1 gene mutation (Burstein, 2013). With a noted increase of genetic testing amongst the public, Kosenko et al. (2016) concluded that Jolie's announcement had both reach and impact, particularly among those who identified with her.

There is research to suggest that news media outlets will differ in political orientation, therefore, affecting their outputs and overall agenda (Salgado & Nienstedt, 2016). To compensate for this, articles were selected from three different news media outlets: *The Guardian* (liberal and left leaning); *BBC news* (more neutral reporting stance) and *The Sun* (Conservative and right leaning). Although, it should be noted that some authors argue the BBC possesses a slight conservative lean, with a heavy focus on economic and business reporting (Mills, 2020). This sample of news media outlets were selected due to their socio-cultural and contextual relevance, as is congruent with a CDA approach (Van Dijk, 2015). To access data for analysis, the OneSearch database was used to access articles from *The Guardian* whereas the google search engine was used to access *BBC* and *The Sun* news media from April 2018 to January 2021. This identified articles that provided insights into reporting trends, from when the initial abuse allegations between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard entered the media cycle, through to the fallout of the libel court case (Ferguson et al., 2020). The search terms 'Johnny Depp', 'Amber Heard', 'Abuse', 'Allegations' were used to produce an initial sample which was then further refined by eliminating the articles that did not include at least three mentions of the key terms (Mendes et al., 2020). This process produced 22 articles that were then scanned further for content before being split into three or more categories: Initial allegations, during the libel case and the fallout of the libel case. With a focus on 'ideological patterns' to reveal the relations between language and power (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 5), articles were chosen for analysis that portrayed a representative sample of the chosen media outlets coverage of the defined categories during the applied date range. Four articles were chosen from each outlet that contained the most occurrences of the search terms, to ensure fair representation for each reporting style. This produced a final sample of 12 articles (Appendix A). Full passages were then subjected to a CDA.

Procedure

The first stage of analysis involved coding where key words, phrases, passages of text or quotes were highlighted to identify certain ideologies, patterns or specific language techniques used (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Then, specific underlying repertoires, actions and linguistic techniques within the discourse are studied, for example looking at semiotic choices or “the way language is used in a social context and the way we use language to create society” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 17). The CDA approach is also abductive in nature, so the current analysis involved constant movement between theory and the data throughout the analytical process (Fairclough, 2013). Machin and Mayr (2012) note that CDA follows no rigid or homogenous structure, however, in order to minimize individual bias, the sample of articles was subject to analysis from both principal researchers (the first two authors) with the aim of achieving an overall consensus. Furthermore, authors guidelines on maintaining quality in the analytical procedure were followed throughout the process (Fairclough, 2001, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Mogashoa, 2014; Wodak, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues were identified. Under the BPS ethical principle ‘Respect’, there is an emphasis on treating people with dignity in recognizing the inherent worth of all human beings despite their gender, ethnic origin or any other group characteristics (BPS, 2018, p. 5). This was met with maintaining a level of respect and a neutral stance when presented with differing viewpoints within articles published by news media outlets. This ethical consideration was vital as IPV in news media through cases, such as the allegations between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard, can be portrayed untruthfully or sometimes without full context which can cultivate biases (Ferguson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Secondly, it was ensured that the analysis was presented in a transparent way to stimulate alternate analytical interpretations but to also avoid the research appearing biased (Machin & Mayr,

2012). The third ethical consideration falls within the principle 'Responsibility' and accepting professional accountability to seek expert advice should there be an issue in complying with copyright law (BPS, 2018).

Reflexivity

A researcher's position can have a profound effect on what the analysis yields (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Therefore, conducting our research through a reflexive practice is crucial to ensure transparency and researcher authenticity (Reich, 2017). Following a synthesis of current literature, it was acknowledged that research agendas can be shaped to produce bias findings, to perhaps fit the narrative that the author is trying to convey (Easteal et al., 2015; King et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2019). Reflecting on our own epistemological and ontological positions, we similarly identify with a more critical realist paradigm. Ontologically, we acknowledge there are objective truths to be uncovered, however what we know or understand about these objective truths can be uncovered through an individual's frame of reference (Fletcher, 2017; Wiltshire, 2018). Furthermore, Critical realism is a pragmatic paradigm, making it a suitable approach to adopt when addressing issues of social justice and power which in this instance refers to the reinforcement of IPV as a gendered issue. In the current research, in employing a discursive approach, there is also an acknowledgement that knowledge and phenomena including issue of power and social justice can be constructed, understood, and displayed through discourse (Fairclough, 2013; Potter, 2013). Hence, the current research takes on a social constructivist epistemological stance.

Despite there being a continuous attempt to remain impartial and without bias throughout this research, in utilizing a reflexive practice within our own research agenda, we understand it is impossible to fully detach our personal thoughts and feelings from this study (Reich, 2017). For instance, we have both familiarized ourselves with literature around the topic of IPV, including how it can affect different victim groups (for example, the LGBTQ+ community and male victims) and the idea of it being

considered a bidirectional phenomenon in some relationships (Bates, 2016; Laskey et al., 2019; Palmetto et al., 2013). These preconceptions may therefore result in an overreliance on literature that supports our viewpoints on IPV, as opposed to considering alternate sources. Furthermore, within our political disposition, we both resonate with left wing ideologies potentially influencing how we perceive media from certain news outlets, or potentially over criticizing discourse in more right leaning sources (Salgado & Nienstedt, 2016). Therefore, to minimize the effects of these preconceptions on the data we collect, we partook in regular reflections during the analytic process to ensure our findings did not hold a bias as well as utilizing meetings with our module supervisor (Branson, 2019). Furthermore, by there being two researchers, this allows for two different interpretations and analytical views of the text, perhaps allowing for alternative interpretations of discourses, and further compensating for certain biases.

Analysis and Discussion

In the current presentation of this CDA, two discursive strategies were agreed upon, where the latter is split into two specific discursive practices. This presentation focuses on these specifically, as initially, it was noticed that these strategies were used frequently in addressing issues of power in the reporting of events. CDA inherently focuses on how power is transmitted and practiced through discourse, and importantly how and why this is represented and what possible ideological goals they might serve (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Van Leeuwen, 2015). Therefore, to best analyze the underlying ideology within the text and examine how issues of power and social justice are communicated by news media texts, it was deemed appropriate to focus specifically on two discursive strategies. These are:

1. Predication and Argumentation
2. The construction of Ingroups and Outgroups
 - a. Functionalisation and Nomination
 - b. Us and Them

This presentation of the analyses aims to provide an in-depth conceptualization of how a range of news media outlets use discourse to communicate issues of power and social justice, and ultimately how IPV is framed in modern news media.

Predication and Argumentation

Predication and Argumentation are identified as key discursive techniques for conveying ideological positioning throughout a text (Fairclough, 2013; Tenorio, 2011). The objective of predication is the labelling of social actors either positively or negatively, whereas argumentation involves the justification of negative or positive attributions made throughout the text (Fairclough, 2013; Van Leeuwen, 2015). Due to an observed, more neutral reporting style, predication and argumentation was not a prominent feature of *The Guardian's* writing style. However, in the present analysis, *The Sun* and the *BBC* news media texts utilised predication and argumentation recurrently throughout the discourse. In the case of the *BBC*, it is noted this use of predication and argumentation may support the claims that the *BBC's* reporting is not impartial (Mills, 2020).

“This case lifted the lid on his privileged but erratic existence, his temper and his history with drink and drugs.” (BBC, 2020)

“Depp launches into a brutal three-day attack in Australia” (The Sun, 2020)

“The star was high on drugs at the time of the attack, which left Heard crying on the ground as Depp yelled over her.” (The Sun, 2020)

Here, the example of predication in the *BBC* and *The Sun* labels Depp as ‘privileged’, ‘erratic’, ‘brutal’, with a ‘temper’ and committing an ‘attack’. He is also labeled frequently throughout both the *BBC* and *The Sun* samples in reference to ‘drink and drugs’. The predications placed on Johnny Depp here aim to label him in a deprecatory manner (Fairclough, 2001, 2013). In the second example from *The Sun*, argumentation is also used in order to justify the previous negative attributions made towards

Depp (Fairclough, 2013). Heard is described as 'left crying on the ground', which could be interpreted as justifying the labeling of Depp as a 'brutal' attacker at various points in the discourse.

"Depp was found to have lashed out at his ex-wife 12 times as he turned into his "monster" persona while bingeing on drink and drugs." (The Sun, 2020)

"Amber, 34, described her pain as she was forced to relive details of her traumatic - relationship with a drink and drug-fueled monster." (The Sun, 2020)

In further examples, *The Sun's* discourse explicitly predicated Johnny Depp, referring to him as a 'monster' or 'drug-fueled monster'. The discourse surrounding Amber Heard's experience in this second example from *The Sun* could also be seen as employing argumentation. As she is described as being 'forced to relive traumatic details' and being in 'pain' from the experience, this could argue to the reader that the vilifying of Johnny Depp throughout, is justified (Van Dijk, 1999). From an ideological standpoint, it is clear that in *The Sun* and the *BBC* there is an explicit attempt to discredit the experiences of Johnny Depp in the relationship. Both news media texts label him in a deprecatory manner, using predication and argumentation (Fairclough, 2013).

Importantly, from a social constructivist view, it is argued that people construct parts of their reality through relying on media as an important source to get information about the world events (Carter, 2013). Therefore, it is also argued that in discrediting Johnny Depp's experience in this relationship, this could perhaps result in readers not acknowledging the potentially multi-faceted nature of IPV (Ali et al., 2016; Bates, 2020; Laskey et al., 2019; Morgan & Wells, 2016). Even reinforcing the current social context of IPV, in there being a failure to recognize marginalized outgroups in movements such as "#MeToo" and "#maybehedoesnthityou" (Mack & McCann, 2018). CDA theory suggests that broader societal discourses of power are often played out through the official language of politics and news media (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Therefore, the power to influence these societal contexts may lay inherently within news media. Certain semiotic choices made in news media discourse, could lead to

establish an association for the reader with the underlying ideology within the news media text (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Throughout the case, Depp and his lawyers have reinforced and presented evidence for the fact that Heard was violent towards Depp (Antoniou, 2020). It is argued that excluding or discrediting Depp's experience translates in a failure to recognize or portray the potentially multifaceted nature of IPV. For male help seeking groups in particular, research suggests that an established lack of support for male victims is fueled by traditional societal expectations of IPV (Bates 2020; Mack & McCann, 2018; Morgan & Wells, 2016). Therefore, it should be considered that reinforcing or re-instating these societal expectations by discrediting experience or excluding individuals in news media discourse, could be potentially damaging for men and other marginalised groups aiming to seek help.

The construction of ingroups and outgroups

In following guidelines from Machin and Mayr (2012) and Fairclough (2013), it was highlighted that there were various techniques utilised in the construction of ingroups and outgroups in texts'.

Therefore, this discursive strategy has been divided into two specific discursive practices:

Functionalisation and Nomination, and Us and Them: the use of pronouns and the classification of social actors.

Functionalisation and Nomination

In news media, people can either be nominated in terms of who they are or functionalized by being depicted in terms of what they do (Van Dijk, 2008). This can have different effects, functionalisation can make a statement sound more official and therefore has connotations of legitimacy to the reader (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

“Lawyers for Depp said the accusations of violence made by Heard were “invented” and he strenuously denied that he had ever been violent towards her.” (The Guardian, 2020)

“The actor announced the decision in a statement on Instagram, one that comes just days after he lost his libel case against the Sun over claims he abused his ex-wife Amber Heard.”
(The Guardian, 2020)

This observation arose particularly in news media produced from *The Guardian*. The functionalisation in terms of individual’s occupations (for example here, Lawyers and Actor) can serve positively in the evaluation of their legitimacy within a certain situation (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Van Dijk, 2008). Yang (2014) argues that news media often represents the opinions of the “high-powered social elites” through functionalisation to place emphasis on an individual's authority within a certain news story (p. 29). Van Leeuwen (2013) notes that the use of functionalisation can also serve to impersonalize social actors (such as Depp in this instance) p. 59). This linguistic device is frequently used throughout news media and may even serve to dehumanize an individual (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

“Mr Depp assaulted Ms Heard and "completely destroyed" a house in a drink- and drug-fueled rage, which the actor denies.” (The BBC, 2020)

“Mr Depp's lawyer called the ruling "perverse" and said the Hollywood actor intends to appeal.” (The BBC, 2020)

“The actor flew into a rage while high on drugs and hit Amber so hard he made her lip bleed”
(The Sun, 2020)

“The outspoken 68-year-old star [Sharon Osbourne] shockingly said the actor doesn't deserve to lose his Hollywood career and that abused Amber Heard "gave him as good as she got".” (The Sun, 2020)

In these examples from *The BBC* and *The Sun* news media outlets, functionalisation is a technique that is regularly used on Johnny Depp, who is often referred to as ‘the actor’ or ‘the Hollywood actor’. Whereas, nomination is frequently used on Amber Heard, who is often referred to as ‘Amber’, ‘Amber Heard’ or ‘Ms Heard’ despite also being an actress by profession (Ferguson et al.,

2020). Here, the specific nomination of Amber Heard makes the aspects of experience that is being reported more personal to her and the regular use of functionalisation reduces Johnny Depp to “just a role” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 81; Van Dijk, 2008). This referential strategy depersonalizes Johnny Depp, placing significant legitimacy on what he does instead of who he is thus, beginning the construction of ingroups and outgroups (Arpin et al., 2017; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Meyer, 2001).

The use of this linguistic device links to the theory of social abjection (Meyer, 2001; Tyler, 2013). Social abjection is described as how society subjugates and dehumanizes the abject, this being the body or thing that one finds repulsive or disgusting, so it is cast aside to preserve the group’s identity (Tyler, 2009, 2013). As Johnny Depp is regularly dehumanized to just his occupation as ‘the actor’, this reflects the current social context of repudiating violence in intimate relationships, particularly violence that is perpetrated by a man against a woman (Bartholomew et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2016). To reinforce this attitude, and to maintain their identity, news media utilize their societal power and influence through the regular nomination of Amber Heard (the victim) to highlight Johnny Depp as the abject or the perpetrator (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Tyler, 2009, 2013; Van Dijk, 2008).

Through the news media’s functionalisation and abjection of Johnny Depp, this persuades the reader to acknowledge his experiences in a specific way (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Tyler, 2009, 2013). By classifying him in his role as an actor, this influences the reader to empathize with nominated Amber Heard, creating the impression that there is a power differential within their relationship despite the two being in the same field of work (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Van Dijk, 2008). This aids in exacerbating a feminist narrative that has socially constructed an ingroup of female victims and an outgroup of male victims by insisting men hold more social, economic and political capital (Lewis et al., 2021; Sweet, 2019; Vrăbiescu, 2019). This portrayal could impact the reader in a way to discredit Johnny Depp’s own experience as a possible male victim within the relationship, reinforcing social abjection and the formation perceived ingroups and outgroups (Arpin et al., 2017; Tyler, 2009, 2013).

Us and Them: The use of pronouns and the classification of social actors

The use of pronouns ('us', 'we' and 'them') can be used by news media to align their readers alongside or against ideas (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Writers within news media institutions use this linguistic device to evoke their own ideas as being the reader's ideas and create a collective 'outgroup' of those who oppose their ideas (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 84; Van Leeuwen, 2015).

"His arrogant lawyers clearly assumed his wealth, fame, A-list friends and -Hollywood charm would prevail — especially after the relentless and sickening character assassination Depp inflicted on his victim Amber Heard." (The Sun, 2020)

"It was depressing though to watch Amber, despite her long ordeal, being vilified on social media yesterday. These same trolls would instantly condemn any abuser whose politics they dislike. This time it was their Hollywood hero in the dock in a libel case against The Sun" (The Sun, 2020)

In these examples from *The Sun*, the writer utilizes pronouns ('her', 'his' and 'their') to provoke specific ideas about Johnny Depp, to create further social abjection in the development of this collective outgroup (Arpin et al., 2017; Tyler, 2009, 2013). This is highlighted through the first example, by nominating Depp in using the pronoun 'his', this places Depp into a category by highlighting the power differentials that come with 'Hollywood charm' and further pushing him into to the outgroup (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2008). This is reinforced using functionalisation with 'his arrogant lawyers' as it adds legitimacy to the statement, further influencing the reader in developing similar ideas to the writer and creating a collective ingroup (Arpin et al., 2017; Machin & Mayr, 2012). The second example works in a similar way, evoking ideas and further expanding the 'outgroup' (Arpin et al., 2017). Again, here Amber is nominated, encouraging the reader to empathize with her experiences and the pronoun 'their' is used to describe 'the trolls' that are 'vilifying' her on social media (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Van Dijk, 2008; Van Leeuwen, 2015). This creates an abjected identity against 'the trolls' further developing

that collective 'outgroup' status, which is highlighted further by the functionalisation and dehumanization of Depp as 'their Hollywood hero' (Arpin et al., 2017; Tyler, 2009, 2013).

This idea of 'Us and Them' is not just developed by the use of pronouns but, can also be noted through the writer's referential choices in the construction of identities and the classification of social actors in news media (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

"In May 2016, Amber Heard, a 30-year-old actress, arrived at a Los Angeles court seeking a restraining order against her husband, the Hollywood star Johnny Depp." (The BBC, 2020)

"the celebrity battle coincided with an increase in UK domestic abuse cases involving libel threats after ex-partners speak out or give friends their account of what happened inside a relationship." (The Guardian, 2020)

"This also applies to survivors who do not fit the image of the 'perfect victim' - and regardless of the high profile of the alleged abuser." (The Sun, 2020)

Within all three examples, both Amber Heard and Johnny Depp are functionalized as 'the actress' or 'the Hollywood star' to add weight to the statements and imply connotations of further legitimacy (Van Leeuwen, 2013). In the second example, it uses functionalisation to describe the 'celebrity battle' coinciding with the rise of domestic abuse cases in the UK (Van Leeuwen, 2013). This again, adds legitimacy, but also could be interpreted as *the Guardian* news media outlet establishing a link between the libel case and the social context within the UK which could be seen as opposing the use of violence in intimate relationships, especially violence that is perpetrated by men against women (Bartholomew et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2016). By making this link, the writer is trying to convey, this idea to the reader, that the outcome of this case and the powerful 'celebrity' influence could have an impact on the social context surrounding IPV (Bartholomew et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2016; Kosenko et al., 2016). Highlighting this power differential has a similar effect to the use of 'us' and 'them' in that it evokes the idea that there is a perceived victim (Amber Heard) and perpetrator (Johnny Depp) in line

with the UK IPV social context (Bartholomew et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2016; Machin & Mayr, 2012). This is further supported in the third example where, despite being referred to as an 'alleged abuser', the power differential is highlighted again to evoke ideas to the reader, but this time between Amber Heard and the 'high profile' Johnny Depp (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). In doing this, the reader is encouraged to, again, discredit Johnny Depp's experiences as a possible male victim of domestic violence in creating that collective ingroup and outgroup (Fairclough, 2013; Park et al., 2021; Van Leeuwen, 2015). Arguably, this could outline further links between the news media representation of this case, and the current social context, in this instance surrounding perceptions of male victims of IPV. Qualitative research has highlighted that some samples of men report experiencing minimization from friends and family, and even secondary abuse (ridicule, doubt and victim arrest) from support services, when coming forward with their experiences (Walker et al., 2020).

Summary

To summarize, the selected news media outlets (*The Sun*, *the BBC* and *The Guardian*) utilize their power and influence by deploying linguistic techniques to evoke ideas to the reader and to manipulate how the case between Amber Heard and Johnny Depp is received by the public (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Depp is predicated throughout the news media coverage and is often portrayed as a 'monster' (Fairclough, 2013). Through the use of pronouns (Us, them etc...) and functionalization, Depp is dehumanized and abjected, thus constructing collective ingroups and outgroups (Tyler, 2009, 2013; Van Leeuwen, 2013). This discursive and textual construction of specific outgroups has been noted in early and previous CDA research (Wodak, 2004). Namely, politicians utilizing allusions in excluding and debasing 'foreigners' within their discourse. (Wodak, 2004, p. 193).

Depp being portrayed as an 'alleged abuser' falls in line with the current social context of opposing the use of violence in intimate relationships, especially violence that is perpetrated by men against women (Bartholomew et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2016). In doing this, the news media could be

potentially disregarding Johnny Depp's experiences as a male victim of domestic violence. Research suggests that a lack of support for male victims is stemmed by traditional societal expectations of IPV (Bates 2020; Morgan & Wells, 2016), therefore, this portrayal of Depp could be potentially damaging for men and other marginalized outgroups aiming to seek help (e.g., see Taylor et al., 2021 a discussion of the barriers men face in help-seeking).

Furthermore, only incidences of physical violence were reported throughout. This falls in line with observations from Carlyle (2014) who found that in news media "rates of sexual, emotional or psychological, verbal, and economic abuse reported... was a small fraction compared with physical violence, which comprised approximately 96% of the overall sample" (p. 2411). It could be argued that, through this observation, perhaps modern news media is neglecting other facets of IPV, particularly non-physical abuse. If so, this would not only limit the reporting of victim's experiences, but also potentially influence the how the public perceive and acknowledge 'victims' and 'perpetrators'.

In addition to this, it was also noted that the violence within Johnny Depp and Amber Heard's relationship was often reported as unidirectional in news media (e.g., where one individual is violent and the other is not; Forgey & Badger, 2006). In doing this, media outlets are overlooking the notion that the violence between the two could be bidirectional (e.g., evidence that both partners can perpetrate and be victim to violence in an intimate relationship, although, this may not be with each violent episode; Palmetto et al., 2013). There is a plethora of research to suggest that this pattern of violence is the most common within intimate relationships (Bates, 2016; Caetano et al., 2005; DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2009). This is further supported by Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (2012) who found that, across five sample types, the average prevalence of bidirectional IPV was concluded to be 57.5% (ranging from a low of 49.2% among the female-oriented, nonmilitary treatment-seeking samples to a high of 69.7% among the male-oriented, military legal/justice samples). Despite this, a gendered paradigm is still largely pervasive in research and practice, which, as is evident in the current CDA, is

potentially reinforced by news media. This will therefore continue to inform stereotypes and victim in-groups/out-groups surrounding IPV (e.g., Bates, 2019; Hine et al., 2020).

Limitations and Future Research

The aim of the current research was to provide an in-depth conceptualization of how a range of news media outlets use discourse to frame IPV in modern news media. As such the method of CDA was employed, an approach inherently rooted in power, ideology and a commitment to social change (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Van Leeuwen, 2015). CDA and discourse analysis in general, is often criticized for being an exercise in interpretation and not rigorous analysis, resulting in findings that hold no practical use or application (Taylor, 2013). Some critics of CDA maintain that there is a large gap between the analyst's interpretation and the producer of the texts' meaning. It is suggested that CDA methodology would benefit from being critical of its own analysis and methodology (Widdowson, 2008). It is argued that in the current research, this critical consideration is demonstrated in utilizing a reflexive practice, recognizing and regularly reflecting on the potential impact of political positions and preconceptions of the researchers on the analytical process (Branson, 2019; Salgado & Nienstedt, 2016). Furthermore, it could be argued that a measure of coherence is established in the articles being analyzed by two researchers. Resultingly, increasing the validity and credibility of findings (Howitt, 2019).

A further criticism of the current research could be the larger sample size used. Conducting a CDA often involves analysis of a small number of texts, sometimes just one or two (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p .207). This larger sample perhaps leans to a more corpus- based approach, which is often criticized as it is generally harder to maintain context in the analysis (Tenorio, 2011). However, it could be argued that a wider current social context is maintained, to a certain extent, as the focus of the articles and news media text (Johnny Depp and Amber Heard case) is a recent event (2016 - 2020).

Even with these limitations, the present analysis revealed a range of discursive strategies used by news media outlets regarding the framing of IPV in modern news media. Firstly, predication and

argumentation were used to classify social actors in the discourse. Explicit predicates and argumentations were used to label Depp in a deprecatory manner, discrediting his experience or reporting of events (Fairclough, 2013). Secondly, the news media outlets used discursive devices: Functionalisation and Nomination and Us and Them in order to create ingroups and outgroups in the discourse around this case. Using these devices, Depp is dehumanized and abjected, constructing collective ingroups and outgroups (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Future research could, specifically investigate the construction of ingroups and outgroups and the potential discrediting of experiences in IPV in news media. As has been previously discussed, news media can influence the ideologies and views of its consumers (Carter, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Furthermore, research suggests that a lack of support for male victims is fueled by traditional societal expectations of IPV (Bates 2020; Morgan & Wells, 2016). It is argued that this societal stigma or expectation encourages male victims to not show emotion as it could be perceived as 'weak', thus reducing help seeking attitudes (Bates, 2019; Morgan et al., 2016; Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). Therefore, taking into account societal attitudes, it is vital that the approach taken by news media outlets is investigated further, as their discourse could perpetuate stereotypes of male victims that are already ingrained in society (Bates, 2019).

Conclusion

The goal of the present research was to provide an in-depth conceptualization of how a range of news media outlets use discourse to frame IPV in modern news media. The text analyzed from the sample of news media outlets illustrated that a range of discursive strategies are utilised in framing IPV and defining victims and perpetrators within the current social context. Two main discursive strategies were presented in this paper: Predication and Argumentation; The construction of ingroups and outgroups (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Depp is often portrayed as a 'monster' and 'abuser' throughout, via the use of argumentation and deprecatory predicates (Fairclough, 2013). Furthermore,

news media discourse using pronouns and functionalisation, Depp is dehumanized and abjected, constructing collective ingroups and outgroups (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Tyler, 2009, 2013). Both of these discursive strategies aim towards discrediting Depp's experience as a male victim of IPV (Fairclough, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). A further observation during the analytical procedure was news media discourse focusing solely on physical violence in their reporting. Resultingly, the discourse in this news media sample discredits the potentially multifaceted and bidirectional nature of IPV (Carlyle, 2014; Palmetto et al., 2013).

Current limitations are recognized with the interpretative nature of CDA, and the employment of a larger than recommended sample size (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Tenorio, 2011). Even with these limitations, it is argued the current research provides a nuanced conceptualization of IPV in modern news media. Therefore, it is recommended, as news media discourse can influence the views and ideologies of its consumers, that this potential effect is investigated further (Carter, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012). This is considered vitally important as this societal attitude and expectation has been suggested to affect the lack of support for outgroups in help-seeking in relation to IPV. Specifically, news media has the ability to influence and/or reinforce deeply ingrained stereotypes and societal expectations that could directly impact stigmatization against victimized outgroups (Bates, 2019; Morgan et al., 2016; Overstreet & Quinn, 2013).

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Appendices

Appendix A

- Johnny Depp and Amber Heard: She was 'the abuser', says Depp's ex-PA.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53393254>

- Inside the Johnny Depp court case

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-54506759>

- Johnny Depp loses libel case over Sun 'wife beater' claim.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/entertainment-arts-54782324>

- Johnny Depp legal case against The Sun gets go-ahead from judge.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-53262085>

- Johnny Depp and Amber Heard: reputations at stake as judgment looms.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/oct/30/johnny-depp-and-amber-heard-reputations-at-stake-as-judgment-looms#:~:text=Johnny%20Depp%20and%20Amber%20Heard%3A%20reputations%20at%20stake%20as%20judgment%20looms,-This%20article%20is&text=It%20has%20been%20three%20months,the%20Royal%20Courts%20of%20Justice.>

- Johnny Depp's barrister tells court Amber Heard invented abuse claims.

<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/jul/07/johnny-depps-barrister-tells-court-amber-heard-invented-abuse-claims-libel-case>

- Amber Heard had bruises and burns when with Johnny Depp, sister tells court

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jul/23/amber-heard-told-her-mother-johnny-depp-was-violent-and-crazy#:~:text=Amber%20Heard%20sometimes%20had%20bruises,the%20high%20court%20in%20London.&text=Henriquez%20said%20she%20began%20to,and%20this%20was%20early%20on%E2%80%9D.>

- Johnny Depp says he has been asked to resign from Fantastic Beasts franchise.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/nov/06/johnny-depp-fantastic-beasts-resign-franchise-statement>

- **TIMELINE OF TERROR** Johnny Depp libel case verdict – The 12 times actor beat ex-wife Amber Heard
<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/uknews/13084520/johnny-depp-beat-amber-heard-12-times/>
- **MASK SLIPS** On behalf of all domestic abuse survivors, we can confirm Johnny Depp IS a wife beater.
<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/13090441/johnny-depp-libel-case-wife-beater/>
- **GONE POTTY** How can JK Rowling be ‘genuinely happy’ casting Johnny Depp in the new Fantastic Beasts film after assault claim?
<https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/6159182/jk-rowling-genuinely-happy-johnny-depp-fantastic-beasts/>
- **'DANGEROUS MESSAGE'** Sharon Osbourne DEFENDS wife beater Johnny Depp & says ‘it takes two to tango’ in shocking statement on US show The Talk
<https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/13136145/johnny-depp-sharon-osbourne-amber-heard-the-talk/>