inSocialWork Episode 291 – Talking (or Not) about Sexual Violence within Mainstream Media: Millan AbiNader, PhD

[00:00:07] Hello from Buffalo and welcome to inSocialWork. This is Louanne Bakk and I'll be your host for this episode. In this podcast, Dr. Millan AbiNader examines how the media portrays sexual violence. Specifically, she discusses how mainstream media conversations pertaining to sexual violence have changed over time, including how the nominee and the accuser have been characterized. Dr. AbiNader holds a PhD from Boston University and is a post-doctoral scholar with Arizona State University. She has worked to prevent and intervene in sexual violence, domestic violence and commercial sexual exploitation. Dr. AbiNader was interviewed by Nicole Capozziello, a PhD student here at the UB School of Social Work.

[00:00:56] Hi, my name is Nicole Capozziello and today I'm speaking with Dr. Milen AbiNader. Welcome to the program. Thank you so much for having me. So to start off, I would love to know how you became interested in this particular topic.

[00:01:08] Great. So I was an advocate before I came back to academia. So I worked with survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence, so intimate partner and family violence, and then also commercial sexual exploitation. And so the continuum of gender based violence, of intimate violence is what my research focuses on and it's rooted in my practice experience. And then as a macro social worker, I'm very interested in the systems and structures that affect people's ability to heal or perpetrators ability to change cultural norms being one of those things that can be operationalized in our media in headlines, which is what we look at here on the study we're talking about today. And then for this particular study, my niece was actually born the day after the accusation against Kavanaugh became public. And so I was visiting her a few days later and holding her and just thinking, as we often do when we're around children. Have we done enough or have we done enough to change the world that we grew up in that it's going to be better for them? And I realized I was holding her, that this was something I could measure because the accusation of sexual violence against a nominee for the Supreme Court had, of course, happened before in 1991 with Anita Hill's accusation of Justice Thomas and that we could actually compare empirically how the media treated these two examples. And so it started with that idea, literally holding my three year old niece, hoping that we had made the world a better place for her and deciding to measure whether or not we had. And so I came back to school. I was still a student and was looking for someone to do this work with me. I talked to a couple of my colleagues, which is violence work, and they were not available. And I was telling my cohort mates that I had this idea and I needed help. And two of them said, well, we'll help you. So Dr. Maggie Thomas, who is a policy expert, joins me on the study, as well as Dr. Kelsey Carolan, who's an expert in qualitative research and studies, disability and work. So it was really wonderful project that we all collaborated on writing the papers while we were students. And was this different from previous projects you've done? Have you ever done sort of a media analysis like this?

[00:03:11] I haven't done a media analysis quite like this. I had done things kind of as a student class paper work before, but not in this very intentional empirical way or to this degree, I guess. But my PhD work in my postdoc work, I'm a post-doctoral scholar at Arizona State University, has primarily focused on homicide and to partner homicide and looking at other community factors.

[00:03:32] So I look at can you level poverty, the relative standing of men to women in communities, rurality over the city as factors that influence violence.

[00:03:41] So I'm always thinking about and engaged in the communal factors that affect individuals experiences of violence.

[00:03:48] And as you mentioned, how that can lead to healing and with the greater societal issues that are connected to exactly with this project. What questions did you hope to address?

[00:03:55] So we had two primary questions for this study, which is when a Supreme Court nominee is accused of sexual violence, have the ways the mainstream media discussed the violence in newspaper headlines changed?

[00:04:07] And then also has how the accuser and the nominee are characterized change? So we are looking at shifts in language around sexual violence itself. The person accused of perpetrating sexual violence and the person who is the victim of sexual violence. So has how the media characterize that shifted. And we did this by looking at newspaper headlines in 1991 and in 2018. Between the date of the public accusation and the day after the confirmation of the judge, we decided to do newspaper headlines because it was the major source of news in 1991 and we wanted to compare apples to apples.

[00:04:44] We are looking at headlines across the two times we looked at headlines from across the United States in major newspapers based on the highest amount of circulation at the time. So we looked at eight different newspapers to collect headlines.

[00:04:56] So before we dove more into the study, I would really like it if you could just define sexual violence for everyone. We know what we're talking about, of course.

[00:05:04] So that's a great question. Sexual violence is a continuum of behavior related to physical intimacy. It may involve contact or it may not. So an example of contact, sexual violence would be things like sexual assault, rape. That was the accusation that was made in twenty eighteen, a multiple perpetrator sexual assault. But it may also not involve physical contact, but be suggestive of physical intimacy. So that includes things like voyeurism, flashing suggestive language and sexual harassment, which can also be physical. The 1991 accusation was a noncontact sexual harassment claim. And so sexual harassment specifically is a legal term. It only legally counts. Hate using that word, but counsel, if it's in the workplace or in schools and there are two types of sexual harassment. One is hostile work environment, which is the idea that there is a environment of sexually charged behavior that is uncomfortable, unwanted, harmful towards the person. So someone repeatedly asking someone else out at work, someone showing pornography at work, things like this. And the other form of sexual harassment is quid pro quo, which is the more stereotyped idea as sexual harassment, which is I'll give you a promotion if you give me some sexual behavior or you go out with me. So we are seeing the sexual harassment. In 1991, one in four women in America experience sexual harassment in the workplace. Estimated at 14 percent of men in America, experience sexual harassment in the workplace. And then twenty eighteen, again, we have the contact sexual violence, which we estimate using national data. That's forty three percent of women have some form of contact, sexual violence in their lifetime and twenty four point eight percent of men experience some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime. We don't have great numbers for either of those for folks that have gender expansive identities, but we think it's about 50 percent in studies that have experienced some form of sexual violence in our lifetime. Those are really stunning figures. Yeah, they're really high.

[00:06:59] And again, those first numbers that I gave around context, sexual violence, that's sexual violence that someone has touched you when you have it once we touch has penetrated when you haven't wanted to be penetrated or you have it made to penetrate someone when you did not want to. So we're talking about, in terms of injury, a particularly more severe form of sexual violence because it can cause injury as opposed to something like voyeurism, which can be incredibly harmful. That may not cause the injury. So it's a really high percentage of folks that are experiencing this of the United States.

[00:07:28] So looking at the two different questions that you asked for the study, what did you find has changed between 1991 and 2018?

[00:07:34] So one of the major things that changed around language when we were looking at the different ways sexual violence was described, we found four buckets. The first was minimization. So sexual violence was talked in a way that minimized it or normalized it. So instead of say things like he asked for dates, he's not asking for data, sexual harassment. He's pursuing her without her consent and without listening to her say no. So that's where minimization. We then saw a second bucket, which is called Stand Environ, which is when they use words like there's an accusation or there's a claim. But they didn't actually say what type of harm it was. It wasn't clear even was harm. It was just like this thing happened. So we've no idea whether the thing was harmful or not. The third bucket was named Silence, and that was when I actually used the term that names the harm. And so some of it was generic, would say something like attack and some of it was accurate. We had one headline in twenty eighteen that said Gang Rape, and we had some headlines in 1991 that actually said sexual harassment. And then our fourth bucket was acid violence. And so these were headlines in which they didn't mention any harm, any accusation at all. It just seemed like there was something that had gone wrong in the process without any reference to what went wrong, was that someone was being accused of harming someone else. And that caused us to question whether that person should become a Supreme Court justice. And so we saw between nineteen ninety one and twenty eighteen was that there was a decrease in minimization, which is great. We don't want people to minimize violence in Nigeria. When we saw some victim blaming headlines like this is true, why did she stay? We didn't see any victim blaming in twenty eighteen. However, the decrease in minimization and there's also a decrease in violence didn't translate to an increase in named violence. It translated to an increase in absolute silence. So people knew how not to talk about sexual violence, but we didn't see them knowing how to properly talk about sexual violence. So instead of saying sexual assault, they said nothing, which we really felt meant that, again, like we've taught people what they should not say, but we haven't taught them what they should say. And so instead they say nothing. So that was one of the major changes with language.

[00:09:41] I think an example you brought up in there was you saw a major decrease in victim blaming, but you're saying you didn't actually see any more appropriate language or specific language fill that void.

[00:09:52] Correct. And another thing that happens around the language in twenty eighteen is even when we saw named violence, it was often generic terms like assault, the one we saw a lot in twenty. Sexual misconduct, sexual misconduct like sexual violence is this continuum of behavior. It was really came from talking about sexual assault on college campuses, but it's this catchall term and it's not specific and it doesn't actually tell you this person was being accused of a crime. It just kind of says they did something sexually that may have been inappropriate, which is really different than saying he's being accused of a multiple perpetrator sexual assault or gang rape. That's very different than saying sexual

misconduct or attack. So even in twenty eighteen, when they did name it, it lacks specificity and accuracy.

[00:10:37] So during the course of the study, what did you learn that surprised you?

[00:10:40] What we learned about what changed from 1991 to 2018 and how he characterized the nominees and the accusers. Was that in 1991 both Thomas and Hill were really able to speak for themselves. They were quoted often. They offered evidence in their defense. Other people offered evidence in their defense as well. They were also explained as whole people. So we saw a lot of headlines about their families and friends and their hometowns. We learned a lot about them just from reading the headlines. And in twenty eighteen, we don't see that. We don't see either Kavanaugh or Ford being described in their greater context. We see very, very few headlines about their families, about where they come from, and we see much more about politicking. So moving these two people through the process of politics for political gain. So we saw things like attacking accuser, GOP adopts Trump strategy. It's not a headline that tells us anything about Ford, and it doesn't help anything about Kavanaugh either. Neither of them were quoted very often. Kavanaugh wasn't quoted at all in any of the headlines. Ford, I think, had three headlines at of I think our end, for 2018, two hundred and forty nine where she's quoted. So they really weren't kidding themselves. We weren't seeing the complexity of who they were as people and we saw much, much more reference to politicking and politics and partisan division in 2018 rather than who these people were and their engagement and trying to find the truth and name the truth. And then speaking of truth, in 1991 we saw, like I said, a lot of people, including the nominee and including Justice Thomas & Hill, offering evidence about why one side was saying the truth and why the other side was saying the truth and why you shouldn't believe the other side. So it was constantly disengagement. And who's telling the truth? Which side should we believe as an American public? And in 2018, we just didn't see that. We didn't see a lot of headlines about their credibility, about evidence, about why one side should be believed or the other. Sometimes people said, I believe this person, but they didn't offer a reason worth 1991. They say I believe Hill because she passed the lie detector test. Her she's an honorable person or I believe Thomas and we just didn't see that occupation with truth in 2018 that we saw in 1991. So related to that one of the things that surprised me and I think surprised both of my coauthor, such as how Dr. Carolan was our findings around Justice Clarence Thomas in the headlines. More often than not, it's really described as a good person who is honorable and who worked really hard to get where he was and who is trustworthy and eligible for the position. Supreme Court justice. We were all children in 1991, so we don't really have any memory of it. So we were expecting something, I guess more like what we saw in 2018 where that's not how Kavanaugh was portrayed. He's not portrayed in the headlines is this honorable person whose roots are important, whose families are important. So we were expecting I guess this is something more like that. And what we really saw with Thomas and Hill as two equal people who were engaged in a truth-telling process together. So it felt much more like a restorative justice process. The harm had been done. The community was coming together to figure out how to alleviate that harm and how to handle that. More than twenty eighteen, it was much more confrontational. And again, it wasn't about the harm. It was about these two political sides that were using these two people to advance the political agenda. So both the findings of how much they focused on the personal lives and the personal qualities of the nominee and the accuser in 1991 surprised us as well as the fact that they were in this process together. They were often in headlines together, either contrasted or noting how similar their backgrounds were. So they were really put forward as two people struggling in this battle for truth together, which we were surprised by.

[00:14:33] And I think something I know that you only analyzed the words in this, but even for me, as just a casual observer in taking the news is sort of the freeze frame I probably have of each individual in my mind. And the one I have a cabinet that I'll probably remember years and years from now is this image of him looking confrontational and angry that I've seen on the front page of the newspaper. Whereas that's not my image of Clarence Thomas, which, you know, he's had a long time on the Supreme Court now that this isn't as fresh. But I would assume that even at the time when you weren't seeing the. Aggressive portrayal of him that we saw what happened at this time?

[00:15:05] Yeah, we really did not in the headline. Very importantly, it's a very valid comment. Thomas made the time was he called the process a high-tech lynching. And so occasionally the headline would portray that as this kind of forceful argument that he was making. But it was still portrayed as a worthy argument. It was not, as we saw with Kavanaugh on the headline, someone yelling that picture, that irrational picture. I have that same picture in my hand. You didn't see that at all. Even when he was saying something that was probably making some of the senators uncomfortable on the panel. Again, it was that valid claim rooted in our history of lynching. Then for accusations black men, for accusations of sexual violence by white women predominantly. And so it came from a really real place and it was treated that way in the headlines. And he was almost always quoted in the headlines as speaking from his own point of view rather than the headline summarizing.

[00:15:55] There are a couple of things that I thought were really strong about your articles reading it. And one of them was I felt like you did a really good job of setting up all of the things these cases had in common and then all the things they don't write, some of the things they had. And you talk about their being both African-American accuser and accused in 1991 and then people of the same race, obviously in twenty eighteen as well. In both cases, you have women that on paper are similar in the fact that they're both respected academic, accusing men that are also on paper pretty similar, that they've had pretty similar careers to get to the Supreme Court nomination. But then some of the major differences, of course, between 91 and 2018 are that the news has changed a decent amount. So you talk about how perhaps in 1991, because this was the major way people were finding out what's happening with the hearings, that maybe that was why Thomas and Hill were able to kind of speak for themselves more, whereas in twenty eighteen people are able to watch things on video and potentially not just live it through the news as much. We're not reliant on the paper news in the same way we were in the early 90s. But then another thing that I thought was really interesting was that you talk about this idea of believability playing a role in addition to emphasizing the political process of twenty eighteen so that both Cabinet and Ford perhaps is a reflection of the divide of this time are people who are seen as playing political roles, whereas there's this kind of search for truth. In 1991, the public was given the idea that they should try to figure out who's telling the truth and who related that. Now to what you called the post truth era. So I was just curious if you could talk a little bit about that and how you saw that come up in this study.

[00:17:28] Yeah, so the post-truth era and there's a lot of people who see this as their topic.

[00:17:33] So I encourage people to go look for other sources and just me talking.

[00:17:37] But the post-truth era, the era that we're in now, is marked by a decreased belief in decreased trust in mainstream media, which has been shown in surveys like that.

Pew Research has done, for example, a increase in fake news, as well as an increase in social commentary, the social media as a way people get news and news coverage. I'm sure we've all clicked right on those news stories like this is what people think about this topic. And then it's like a Twitter post and the news like a sentence. So that kind of increase in lay commentary that we get through social media is another marker of this post truth era. And you can kind of think about it as an old sitcom ran for a long time, which is social construction. The idea that there is no objective reality, it's all just our perception of that reality. And that's sort of what we're seeing post-truth America, is that there isn't this objective truth anymore, but rather it's all of these people's opinion of what the truth is in this whatever is happening tangibly in the world. And so that's really what we saw in the headlines was people's opinions, people talking about their meaning that they're attributing to what's happening as opposed to, again, like tangible evidence. There were witnesses. They passed the lie detector test. She told someone when it was happening, we just don't see that in 2018. There is not an interest in tangible evidence. There's not an interest in truth. It's these two people tell their story and all these other people have opinions about it, senators, the public, the president. And so we hear a lot from other people in 2018. So there's just a lack of concern and intrusive opinions, particularly from politicians in 2018, that we think is partially treated to this post-truth era, partially probably created by hearing from the politicians to the high partisan division we're experiencing right now our country, which again loops in the feedback loop with that post-truth era of hearing from the two sides, their opinion on a topic rather than if there's an actual answer.

[00:19:31] And I think unfortunately, with sexual violence, there's a lot of misunderstanding of what that term means. And all of the terms around it that we've seen come up in the meta era. And as you've talked about, there's this continuum, right? So it's often not a really neat kind of case like what you want to see in the movies where it's really easy and there was clear evidence and it's usually not that neat. Unfortunately, that was probably a factor. And sometimes people don't know how to approach it. And I think the media isn't helping that, as you're saying.

[00:19:57] I think that's very true. And sexual violent crimes are one of the hardest crimes. To prosecute and to make arrests for because there often is not physical evidence, there's often not a witness, more often than not the people have some form of relationship, regardless of the gender of the person being sexually assaulted, the age of that person where they are in the country. More often than not, people are sexually assaulted by someone they know, whether it's an acquaintance, an intimate partner, a family member or friend, someone in power, like a teacher or an officer. That's actually true all over the world.

[00:20:28] So it's a very, very hard crime to prove, which is one of the things that was interesting in 1991 was it wasn't necessarily about proving a crime again. It was about this conversation around the harm we do to one another and how we as a community should recognize that harm and react to that harm. We have postured ERA than we already are talking about, a subject that so often boils down to, he said. She said that became a classic term because that's usually the evidence is one person's story versus another person's story.

[00:20:58] What do you find the key takeaway of the study to be? And then also what implications are there for addressing sexual violence today?

[00:21:04] So one of the key takeaways for me is when I was an advocate, one of the first things I did was I went into high schools, middle school and elementary schools and did

sexual violence prevention education. So I talked to kids about what sexual violence was, how you respond, how you get help if this is something that's happened to you, things like that. And so one of the things that really related to my personal experience was it's not enough to teach people what not to say. It's not enough to say, well, don't blame the victim. It's not enough to say don't use that term. It's insulting around sexual violence. We have to teach people what to say. And I'm not sure when I was doing the education work 15 years ago that we were doing an adequate job of that. And I think we see that in these headlines, especially with the increase of the acid violence. From the headline, we need to teach people how to talk about difficult topics, sexual violence only being one of those topics that we need to help people understand how to talk about and how to have real engaged communication with. Because if we're not talking about issues, if we're not naming issues, they're really hard to tackle.

[00:22:04] And there's been research that shows that when people hold victim blaming myths or believe myths about sexual assault, like if you're drunk, you can consent to sexual assault or if you're high. Things like that. They were sexually assaulted because of what they were wearing. These myths that some of us grew up with. If people believe those men, they are less likely to identify a sexual assault that happens to them as a sexual assault. So if we don't use correct terminology in appropriate ways, we don't teach people how to talk about these difficult issues. They can address them in themselves and they certainly can't address them in society. So that's I think something really important is that we teach people how to talk about sexual assault, not only not to talk about sexual assault in 1981. Yes, they didn't talk about acts of violence as often, but they had minimization. They had victim blaming. They didn't name the sexual violence as often as they did in twenty eighteen. And even though there was a sexual violence accusation against the nominee, the Senate has no policy on how to handle that. And we saw that in twenty eighteen. The same situation came around again. A Supreme Court nominee was accused of sexual violence and there was no policy in place, no way to talk about it in twenty eighteen. So we saw the hearing happen as it happened. So that's the first thing. The second thing is that stories of sexual violence are being politicized and that it's not always necessary about highlighting the harms. So I think at the beginning of me to believe survivors, time's up. Whatever you want to call this movement, we had these journalists that were really committed to highlighting survivors stories and uplifting their voices. And that's not always necessarily true of everyone that's highlighting the voices. So, again, we saw all of these political movements with using Ford and as pawns on the political chessboard. One way that this was really highlighted is that in over 50 percent of the headlines about Ford, she was not referred to by name. She was referred to by accuser or cabinet, most often Kavanaugh's accuser. So the stories weren't necessarily about her or wasn't about supporting her or highlighting this harm has been done. And so I encourage people when they are hearing stories of sexual violence in the media to think about why the story is coming forward now, whose uplifting the voice and do they have another motive and how the coverage is taking place about sexual assault. And I don't mean the survivor themselves. I mean the people around the survivor. Did someone sit on a story and is now letting it out a month later at a politically convenient time? I worry about that a lot as an advocate, that people are manipulating survivors for political gain. And so thinking about if you hear these stories leaving the survivor uplifting the survivor and questioning the timing and the political purpose of the story, that sounds kind of conspiracy ish, but definitely something we saw in 2018.

[00:24:45] It was not about highlighting her harm or acknowledging that the survivor isn't in control of their story entirely.

[00:24:50] Yeah, and I'm defending who they give it to and when. Yeah. And you look at Dr. Ford timeline, she makes reports the FBI, she makes a report to the senator and then there are all of these months it's. In both cases, the story was leaked before they had an opportunity to say, OK, I'm ready to publicly accuse Mr. Kavanaugh. So once a survivor tells their story to someone, they aren't in control of how it's spread.

[00:25:14] So I think being mindful of that, we were consuming media. The third takeaway doesn't have to do with the study itself, but rather the process. And this is really a take away that I hope that MSNBC is here is that we were three students in twenty eighteen, having just spent a year listening to accusations against various people of sexual violence and then having this massive moment where a Supreme Court justice was once again accused of sexual violence in the country, once again had an opportunity to decide whether or not that mattered for their eligibility to the court. And we all felt like we needed to do something. And so we did this and it had nothing to do with any of our dissertations, had nothing to do with any of our research assistantship work. And I think right now, this is the first week of June in 2020 There's a lot of stuff going on right now that social work, research and social work practice can help. And if students feel like they need to do something, write the paper, take the time and do the study, that's going to help find some friends to do it with you, even if they're not an expert in it or you're not an expert in it. If you're an MSW student and you want to do some work related to what's going on, do it. I think if students we often feel like we can't students, we can't control what we write, like we're locked into our dissertation and we're locked into our work. But I really encourage students to do the work that likes them, even if it's a side project and it takes longer than it would if you were doing it.

[00:26:39] How was this change? You pay attention to headlines or consume the news.

[00:26:43] I think it's given me more language to talk about the headlines, but headlines are something I've always been very aware of. I spend most of my time studying intimate partner violence and intimate partner homicide.

[00:26:55] So I have long rants about headlines that say things like it was a mercy killing or a lover's quarrel, which we're still somehow seeing in 2020 all the time when no one's intimate partner violence. It was one person deciding to kill another person, typically in the context of many years of harm toward that person.

[00:27:14] So headlines are something I've always been pretty critical about. But I think the other thing that this has encouraged me and showed me is paying more attention to the various ways people get their news and looking outside in the mainstream media and how people cover things, they're looking at headlines, I think about headlines broadly. So let's just be saying, what's Twitter saying? What's the headline in the Huff Post and in Slate, not just with the headline in The New York Times or the headline in The L.A. Times or wherever you are, the big newspaper.

[00:27:44] You talked about how in your personal work you talk to people about changing language on an individual level. So telling them not only what not to say, but what to say instead. How do you think that that can translate to the systemic level, whether that's the media or political system? And I guess if you could speak to the media, what would you want them to do or how would you want that to be changed? And to see that reflected on this larger level?

[00:28:04] I'd like people to use accurate terms. I think that that's such a simple change and would make a huge difference. So say the hard work. They say sexual assault, say police violence, say the term that makes people uncomfortable. They're the correct term, very accurate term. Again, if we don't call things what they are, everything else that comes after it, policies we make after understanding what kind of problem it is in the first place, basic policy framing. We don't name things accurately. It's very, very hard to do anything else. So I would really like to see accurate terminology. And even if it means in sexual violence cases that you're putting alleged in front of it, because it hasn't been proven yet, that's their prerogative as journalists. So that's fine. But using the actual term, this analogy like the news coverage would have been like of the 2018 situation, it every single time they talked about the accusations, they actually said multiple perpetrator sexual assault or gang rape, people would have been made uncomfortable. And from that uncomfortable place, that requires a reaction from people causing you to say sexual misconduct or an accusation, you can ignore what's really happening, but accurate, specific language, you have to face what's in front of you. So I think that for everything, the first step, whether it's in policymaking, in media, in our own personal conversations with family or social media, is using accurate language and not trying to cover it up.

[00:29:26] But based on your research, what further research do you think is important on this topic? So I think most of the things the future research is important has to do with our limitations.

[00:29:35] So like I said, we chose the headline because there's a lot of research that says they're actually the only part of the news people read and that headline stories instead of looking at headlines and they can actually change people's opinions. They also are a way that writers just simply say what they think is most important and salient to the public.

[00:29:52] So there are a good way of measuring cultural norms and cultural beliefs and attitudes. So that's what we chose them. But they're limited. We all feel that. We probably missed a lot of the racial dynamics in 1991 by not reading the entire article, so I think there's a whole body of research that could happen around looking at the differences specifically around race. If you use between anyone in twenty eighteen, if you use more context on how people were framed and how people were talked about, then there's a whole other stuff we missed.

[00:30:24] The two forms of sexual violence are different. What would we have found if we had read the whole articles or if we had watched old news coverage of people speaking?

[00:30:32] Would there have been something different? I think other feature studies, we compare these two cases because they happened in the same process.

[00:30:39] So it's two Supreme Court nominees who are nominated by Republican president being accused of an act of sexual violence and eventually after hearing, being confirmed by the Senate and Congress. But I think you can also look at other parallel cases that don't necessarily fit that very specific little bubble. So you could compare multiple cases in this era where people in power have been accused of sexual violence.

[00:31:05] And look at how the headlines shift based on who they are, what industry it is, etc.. The other part that I think our study was lacking because we looked at the newspaper itself was how do people actually consume it? So if we had showed headlines to individuals and said, what does this make you think of understanding how the public is responding and thinking about the headlines and newspaper coverage? Media coverage, I

think, is a really important part of understanding media by just looking at the headlines we missed. So I think people could do studies about how headlines, whether in a physical, this paper or online are affecting people's opinions about sexual violence. That's about math, gender norms, things like that.

[00:31:45] I think it would be really interesting to know what people even know about the terms that you're using and what they're taking away from it. And also, you pointed out in the study that it was a very different political climate in 2018 than it was in 1991. So where people are coming at it from that angle as well.

[00:31:59] Yeah. And that's why it might be interesting to look at cases from the same era we are in the special times. And so trying to understand what sexual violence coverage tells us about this time. I'm sure someone is doing that somewhere right now. So it would be a good study.

[00:32:15] So how does this work fit into your larger research agenda?

[00:32:18] So I'm really interested in, I say academically, the structural etiology of gender based violence. So that means what is it about our system that causes gender based violence? There's two main questions when we think about harm. One is why did an individual choose to perpetrate that harm? And the second is, what is it about the context that makes that choice possible in the first place? And I'm really interested in that second question. So this fits into that agenda by focusing on media, which, as I said in the beginning, is an operationalization of our cultural norms and beliefs around sexual violence. Again, in twenty eighteen, it's showing that potentially whether or not the crime happens doesn't matter. So if you're a survivor, do you bother to tell anyone, anyone you're in this truth telling process together trying to figure out what happened? He still becomes a Supreme Court justice. Do you tell anyone because she gave him this heart wrenching process and nothing changed. So understanding how we frame and talk about sexual violence, how we're treated in the media affects those individual choices. So that's how the system is looking at that macro level factors that affect individual experience.

[00:33:23] But finally, are there any resources that you'd like to recommend? Or listeners can find out more information either about your studies, these two cases of sexual violence, resources in general from your career as both an advocate and now as an academic?

[00:33:33] Yeah, so our study that we've been talking about today was published in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence. We are working on another paper from this data set, looking more at the social construction of everyone involved, including the politicians in their presence. So that will come out in support of it's interesting deal. And then as an advocate, the resources I want to talk about are supporting survivors of sexual violence and their family members. So if someone you know or your spouse has experienced sexual violence, there are resources all over the country to help you talk some national resources. The first one is called RAINN Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

[00:34:10] It's available to all people. English and Spanish is online and over the phone. The second is the National Domestic Violence Hotline. That's specific to intimate partner violence. So if you've experienced sexual violence in the context of an intimate partner relationship, they can support you there next to projects that are more focused on mental health but support survivors who are struggling with mental health suicidality after sexual assault. And so one of those, the Trevor Project. The Trevor Project, particularly focuses

on LGBTQ youth and individuals. So that is one. And the other one is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. All of those resources I just mentioned RAINN, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, the Trevor Project, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to phone and chat available twice available, multiple languages available are twenty four, seven and are national. So those are all resources. Available to anyone in the country, if you need support or someone to love and support.

[00:35:05] I will. Thank you so much for joining me today. It's been a really interesting conversation. Thank you for having me.

[00:35:09] You've been listening to Dr. Millan AbiNader discuss her research on how the media portrays sexual violence. For more information on this episode. Please visit our website and in social work, dawg, and please join us again and in social work.