

## ABSTRACT

### PUBLIC SENTIMENT ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF TWITTER RESPONSE TO THE RAY RICE INCIDENT

By

Jovantae S. Holloway

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This thesis examines the public perception of the Ray Rice and Janay Rice intimate partner violence (IPV) incident that occurred on February 19, 2014. This event became the source of thousands of tweets, revealing a representation of public response to IPV through the lens of sports, African American celebrities and gender. Exploring public response through social media, this thesis analyzed a sample of 332 tweets at two time periods, one centering around the NFL announcement of a 2-day suspension of Ray Rice and the other later announcement regarding the announced indefinite suspension of Ray Rice. The thesis includes a qualitative investigation of tweet contents to examine public sentiment regarding IPV victimization and accountability during the two time periods. This study expands on research on IPV and social work through being one of the first research projects to integrate an analysis of gender, violence and social media.



PUBLIC SENTIMENT ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF  
TWITTER RESPONSE TO THE RAY RICE INCIDENT

A THESIS

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Committee Members:

Mimi Kim, Ph.D. (Chair)  
Julie O'Donnell, Ph.D.  
Steve Wilson, Ph.D.

College Designee:

Nancy Meyer-Adams, Ph.D.

By Jovantae S. Holloway

B.A., 2013, University of California, Santa Barbara

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

On February 19, 2014, TMZ.com, one of the Internet's most notorious websites for creating and exposing celebrity gossip and controversy, leaked a video on their website that showed NFL star Ray Rice dragging his then fiancée, Janay Rice, out of an elevator (Bien, 2014). After investigating with police, reviewing the footage, and interviewing Ray Rice and Janay Rice, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell suspended Ray Rice for two football games on July 24, 2014 (Bien, 2014). Following the public criticism about whether the two-game suspension was appropriate as well as the release of another video released by TMZ on September 8 that showed Ray Rice hitting his wife unconscious, the Ravens immediately revoked his contract and the NFL suspended him indefinitely on September 8, 2014 (Bien, 2014).

The video footage of the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incident is only one of the latest publications by TMZ.com containing leaked photos and footages of violence among African American celebrities. On February 8, 2009, TMZ released a photo that explicitly revealed the battered face of Rihanna after an altercation with Chris Brown. On May 12, 2014, TMZ.com also publicized footage of Solange Knowles's physical confrontation in an elevator with Jay Z while Beyoncé Knowles stood as an observer of the altercation. In response to these publications, memes circulated the web to

caricaturize Rihanna and her decision to return to Chris Brown, as well as the aggression of Solange, the defenselessness of Jay Z, and the neutrality of Beyoncé. During the Halloween that followed the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incident, some people dressed as Ray Rice dragging a doll to represent Janay Rice; others dressed as Janay Rice with a black eye (Maule, 2014). The publications by TMZ.com and the public responses to these publicized incidences demonstrates how media representations shape portrayals of African American celebrities as violent and contribute to the public imagination of these images as a form of entertainment.

The altercation in the elevator between Ray Rice and Janay Rice has attracted the attention of numerous web-based news and entertainment sites, as well as various users of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Twitter, in particular, has been used by individuals, celebrities and organizations as a forum to generate discussions about the incident and to post their perceptions about intimate partner violence (IPV; Goldberg, 2014). With Twitter's instantaneous engagement in online discussions on popular media events such as the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incidence, it allows for a wide range of sentiments with an immediate and uncensored quality not always present in other forms of media.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to analyze public sentiment towards IPV in the form of tweets. The analysis employed a qualitative iterative content analysis of tweets to understand the emergent factors that influence underlying public understandings of victimization and accountability.

### Research Questions

Research questions guiding this study include: (1) What public sentiments of IPV emerge from the Ray Rice/Janay Rice incident? (2) What public perceptions of IPV victimization and accountability are elucidated in the Ray Rice/Janay Rice incident? (3) How does the level of consequence imposed on the perpetrator of violence, Ray Rice, influence public perceptions of IPV victimization and accountability?

### Definitions of Relevant Terms

This study uses the following definitions and conceptualizations:

*Hashtag*: A word or phrase preceding the pound (#) symbol to associate Twitter messages with certain events or content (Hiscott, 2013).

*Hyper-masculine*: A term used to describe the intensity of physical strength and aggressiveness (Harris, 2000).

*Intimate partner violence (IPV)*: Power exercised by one intimate partner's consistent dominance of their needs over another intimate partner through emotional, physical, psychological, and/or economical means (M. Johnson, 2011).

*Retweet*: The spreading of verbatim information and content on Twitter (S. Williams, Terras, & Warwick, 2013).

*Victim-blaming*: The act of holding a victim of violence as wholly or partially responsible for the harm that befell on them (Yamawaki, 2012).

*Trending topic*: A topic usually in the form of a hashtag that was either tweeted around 1,200 times from 12 a.m. to 6 a.m. PDT or around 1,700 times from 6 a.m. to 12

p.m. PDT. A trending topic's popularity is defined by the magnitude of tweets within a short period of time (Twitter, 2014).

*Tweet*: The act of posting a message on Twitter. "Tweets" refer to updated posts (Pak &).

### Relevance to Social Work and Multiculturalism

This research has cross-cultural relevance because it helps understand the ways consumers of social media interpret and form an opinion on IPV in African American communities. In addition, this research is engaged in the cultural phenomenon of popular social media platforms and the ways its conventions create spaces for people to mass communicate to one another about topics such as IPV and related issues of gender and race.

Social workers need to be aware of how media events and social media influence public sentiment on critical social issues such as IPV. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, social workers should recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values may marginalize, alienate, or enhance privilege and power in shaping life experience in order to be culturally competent (2015). Being proactive about gaining about gaining knowledge of emerging technological developments and societal trends will help social workers be updated on issues important to cultural competence and keep the field of social work practice flexible and adaptive to changing trends.

CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW  
IPV Overview

Prevalence

Based on a 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, the lifetime prevalence that a woman has experienced physical violence, generally, at least one form of severe physical violence such as being punched or slammed, or some form of psychological abuse by an intimate partner is 31.5%, 22.3%, and 47.1%, respectively (Basile et al., 2011, p. 13). In addition, the lifetime prevalence that a woman in the United States has been raped and experienced other forms of sexual violence by an intimate partner is 8.8% and 15.8%, respectively (Basile et al., 2011, p. 13).

IPV is also an issue that victimizes men. The lifetime prevalence that a man has experienced physical violence, at least one form of severe physical violence, and experienced some form of psychological violence is 27.5%, 14.0%, and 46.5%, respectively (Basile et al., 2011, p. 13). Furthermore, the lifetime prevalence that a man in the United States has been raped and experienced other forms of sexual violence by an intimate partner is 0.5% and 9.5% respectively (Basile et al., 2011, p. 13). As these statistics show, both men and women are subject to victimization by a perpetrator they know.

## Feminist Theories of Gender Violence and Control

### Patriarchal Institutions and Gender Violence

Feminist theories of violence posit violence against women as a normal dynamic within the institutions of marriage and the family through the system of patriarchy (Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007; Dobosh & Dobosh, 1979, Hunnicut, 2009). One of the most classic definitions of patriarchy is derived from Dobash and Dobash (1979), who stated that patriarchy is a hierarchical institution in which males have power and privileges over women. In other words, patriarchy as an ideology provides the rationale that it is politically and socially just for women to be treated as inferior. Hunnicut (2009) emphasized that patriarchal ideas of protection of women actually serve as mechanisms to control and commit violence against women through constructions of femininity as weak. Under traditional patriarchy, female subordination is a social fact within the family of origin and throughout marriage and must be enforced through a system of male-dominated institutions (Brown et al., 2007).

### Female Subordination and Mechanisms for Control

Although the United States women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s allowed for more women to obtain more financial and social independence from their male partners, Stark (2007) argued that male perpetrators of violence continue to use coercive control to reinforce IPV. According to Stark, coercive control consists of the following inter-related components: the violation of a woman's physical integrity that denies women respect and autonomy (intimidation); the deprivation of social connectedness (isolation); and the appropriation or denial of resources needed for personhood (control).



Hence, coercive control is a process that involves the combination of intimidation, isolation, and control.

One of the main tactics of coercive control includes a micro-regulation of everyday behaviors of women, such as how women ought to dress, cook, clean, and socialize (Stark, 2007). Coercive control isolates women from resources such as money, access to communication and transportation, and relies on women's vulnerable positions as women due to sexual inequality (Stark, 2007). More forms of control include appropriating their resources; undermining social support; subverting their rights to privacy, self-respect, and autonomy; and depriving them of substantive equality (Stark, 2007).

Richie (2012) described the process through which violence diminishes a woman's self-determination over time. She characterized IPV as power exercised by one partner's consistent dominance of their needs over the other. These dynamics are expressed through chronic irritation and irrational agitation that escalate over time followed by a pattern of abuse and control. The perpetrator creates a hostile social environment to disorient, terrify, and disadvantage the less powerful partner (Richie, 2012). This environment threatens her sense of self and abilities to differentiate between what is right or wrong and undermines her capacity to resist further aggression (Richie, 2012).

### Types of IPV

M. Johnson (2011) utilized feminist theories to describe three types of IPV. One type is intimate terrorism, which involves physical and/or sexual violence, economic abuse and emotional abuse; these forms of abuse are usually done in tandem with

constant monitoring and blaming of the victim to terrorize the victim (M. Johnson, 2011). A second type of IPV is the retaliation by the victim to the attacker (M. Johnson, 2011). M. Johnson stated that victims retaliate as either an instinctive reaction to being attacked or as a means to end assaults on them that they feel will not stop. Women who feel that retaliation is not an option resort to other means of coping. A third type of IPV is situational couple violence or when a couple's argument progressively escalates to aggressive levels of violence (M. Johnson, 2011).

M. Johnson (2011) transcended previous feminist understandings of IPV by categorizing and analyzing various feminist perspectives. M. Johnson stated that, while feminist understandings of IPV during the 1960s cited patriarchy as a main contributing factor to IPV, feminist theories evolved to also consider other approaches such as personality and attachment theories. In addition, M. Johnson debunked the myth that feminist theories simply posit men as perpetrators of IPV by stating that more contemporary feminist theories acknowledge that women and men equally contribute to situational partner violence and that there are few female intimate terrorists, including those in same-sex intimate relationships. In fact, M. Johnson expanded on those feminist theories with his own typology that addresses what he views as limitations of previous feminist views. His typology extends beyond power and control models of IPV that do not represent the differentiation of IPV cases. His typology also posits that situational couple violence accounts for most cases of IPV.

### Masculinity and Gender Violence

Hunnicut (2009) argued that the more disenfranchised men are from positions of power, the more likely they are to use violence to reinforce the only position of

dominance available to them. Men use violence to maintain their advantage in the most disadvantaged circumstances due to pressures to conform to hyper-masculinity. Harris (2000) used hyper-masculinity to refer to the intensity of physical strength and aggressiveness. Harris stated men use violence to align their own identities to masculine ideas to prove a masculinity that is distant from femininity or homosexuality.

Harris (2000) also asserted that gender is not a trait people have, but an act people commit. She argued that violence is disproportionate among men because it is a socially recognized way of being a man. Masculinity is established through male definitions of “what they are not” and through constant dynamics of envy and competition. According to Harris, men place themselves in competition with other men by reducing other men in the group to characteristics and status associated with women and by abusing them. This creates the constant condition of insecurity, shame and threat if their hold on masculinity is lost.

### Understanding Victimization

#### Why Victims May Stay

Although women may want to leave a partner who is domestically abusive, research shows various reasons for why they may stay. Many studies emphasized that victims primarily stay in their intimate relationships due to external reasons, such as financial support (Hodges & Cabanilla, 2011; M. Kim & Gray 2008; Lacey, 2010). However, other researchers linked reasons why victims stay due to the impact of violence upon the victim’s inner psychological state (Mikaeili, Abdi, & Givi, 2010; Stark, 2007). Prolonged emotional abuse within an intimate relationship may discourage women from seeking support or leaving and, instead, foster a pessimistic outlook on alternatives to

staying with the partner as well as low self-esteem (Mikaeili et al., 2010). Stark (2007) also referred to trauma theory, saying that women largely stay because they develop repressive syndromes of psychological dependence, such as PTSD, which are induced through repeated acts of severe violence. Because women who face IPV are also often isolated from other forms of social support, terminating an emotional connection or dependency on the abuser may be a difficult step to take (Mikaeili et al., 2010). Researchers also show that victims are likely to return to the abuser to regain a sense of improved quality of life if they receive negative responses from families and friends (Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003; Patzel, 2006).

#### Public Perception and Victim Blaming

Research has examined negative or victim blaming attitudes toward women who experience IPV (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008; Esqueda & Harrison, 2005; Witte, Schroeder, & Lohr, 2006; Yamawaki, 2012). Studies show that people are more likely to blame the victim if they conceive of the woman as behaving nontraditionally (i.e., being verbally aggressive or reacting negatively to the abuse) as opposed to being traditional (i.e., being warm, soft-spoken, and accepting of the husband's actions; Capezza & Arriaga 2008; Witte et al., 2006). Another justification people may have is the conception that a woman must have provoked the man in some manner to deserve a violent response (Esqueda & Harrison, 2005). Other reasons include inaccurate conceptions of innate female character traits as a contributor to IPV. This includes beliefs that women are masochistic or desire being abused (Yamawaki, 2012). This aforementioned scholarship showed that understandings of gender roles tend to place women in a position of blame for their own victimization.

## The Construction of the Deserving Victim

Research revealed how victimization of women experiencing IPV is constructed differently for different women. In Stark's (2007) account of the impact of the women's shelters that evolved in the 1990s, he stated that the shelters provided narrow definitions of which victims were considered worthy enough to have access to shelters. The "worthy" victims had the following criteria: they suffered severe injury, had no place to turn when they called the shelter, and were considered morally pure (Stark, 2007). These constructed profiles, he argues, determined which women had emergency situations and which women were not in immediate danger (Stark, 2007). Richie (2012) also supported the idea that mainstream society creates a definition of "deserving victims" by experiences that can easily be understood and can elicit public sympathy. In her account, the deserving victim has been organized around select few images, largely determined by race and class. Images of morally acceptable victims do not account for all women, prioritizing White middle class women as opposed to those who are African American, poor and may be targets of police violence (Richie, 2012).

The idea that some victims of IPV are more deserving of institutional benefits than other is also seen in Kern, Libkuman, and Temple's (2007) study that investigated the factors that influenced conviction of a husband who committed IPV. Through sentencing decisions that arose from four mock trials, they found that participants reduced sentencing of the husband if the wife was thought to have provoked him than if the husband was not provoked (Kern et al., 2007). Similarly, Pape and Arias' (2000) finding that shelter workers' attitudes toward women were more positive toward women who were less hopeful about their perpetrator's behavior than toward women who were

more hopeful, demonstrating that victimization was taken more seriously if the victim seemed more likely to end the abusive relationship.

Bryant and Spencer (2003) conducted a study to examine the attitudes of university students about blame for IPV. Through distribution of a survey to 346 participants that assessed whether attribution of blame was related to situational, perpetrator, societal, or victim factors, the researchers found that male students were more likely to blame the victim than female students (Bryant & Spencer, 2003). In addition, they found that students who had previous exposure to forms of violence in their families were more likely than students without previous experience with violence to attribute blame to societal factors (Bryant & Spencer, 2003).

People who are ingrained with myths related to IPV tend to blame victims who return to their abuser (Yamawaki, 2012). One myth is the ease of access to escape from the abuser. Even if the initial abuse was not blamed on the woman, women may be blamed for reoccurring abuse because she did not leave to end the abuse (Yamawaki, 2012). This is particularly true when people observe victims who are in a dating relationship as opposed to a married relationship based on conceptions that dating victims have more ways to leave relationships that are associated with lower degrees of commitment. In addition to those myths, people may also believe that married husbands would only abuse their wives out of the best interest of the family unit (Yamawaki, 2012).

S. Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) found that women who were homemakers were perceived as warmer, less competent, less negative, and less blameworthy than a woman who worked or did not exhibit these traits. Additionally, their study found that

that the lawyer victim was perceived more negatively and blamed more because she was perceived as lacking warmth. Theories suggested that victim blaming is a way people can come to grips with or make sense of an unjust event; a victim must have done something to provoke or cause this negative event to happen (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Fiske et al., 2002; Yamawaki, 2012).

#### IPV: Intersectionality of Race and Gender

Several researchers have addressed the ways that intersections of race, class, and gender shape women's experiences with IPV (Bograd, 1999; Crenshaw, 2012; Garfield, 2001; Richie, 2000; Sokoloff, 2004). Crenshaw (2012) coined the term intersectionality to describe the ways race and gender intersect to shape the experiences of African American women and argued that their experiences cannot be wholly captured by only focusing on one form of oppression. Crenshaw advocated that it is necessary to explore the multiple ways race and gender overlap in shaping structural, political and representational parts/aspects of violence against women of color.

Similarly, Sokoloff (2004) suggested that gender inequality is neither the most important nor the only factor that needs to be considered when examining women of color's relation with IPV because gender inequality is only one part of their marginalization. Additionally, Richie (2000) stated that poor women of color are not only more likely to be in dangerous intimate relationships, but they are also likely to be in dangerous social positions. Garfield (2001) reinforced this statement by noting that women of color's perception of violence may differ from mainstream definitions of violence. In some cases, physical aggression is not regarded as violent to the extent of racism (Garfield, 2001).

Bograd (1999) also argues that IPV is not simply a phenomenon that women experience equally. The nature of IPV and how it is experienced and responded to by others, personal and social consequences, and the access of escape and safety from the violence, is shaped by race and class. Women of color's experiences with IPV require structural solutions that address IPV and its intersecting inequalities based upon race, class, sexual orientation, as well as cultural institutions (Sokoloff, 2004).

Researchers have demonstrated the ways the anti-violence movement's alliance with the criminal justice system to eradicate gender violence has failed to consider an intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 2012; M. Kim, 2012; Richie, 2000). Crenshaw (2012) demonstrated how IPV advocacy as a criminal justice issue as opposed to part of gender subordination was not an effective remedy for women of color. Through the voices of participants in a 2-day symposium, Crenshaw found that women of color believed that the criminalizing of IPV did little to protect women of color from violence and even increased risk of injury, death, and arrest. Richie (2000), in her black feminist's reflection of the anti-violence movement, stated that the anti-violence movement is overly reliant on law enforcement to end violence against women, despite women of color feeling more threatened by increased police aggressiveness and mass incarceration. M. Kim (2012) also stated that the over-reliance on criminalization of IPV limits the opportunities for imaginative responses to violence that are accessible and relevant to marginalized communities.



## IPV in African American Communities

### Race, Structural Conditions and Violence in African American Communities

The issue of IPV in African American communities has been the subject of public concern. According to West (2004), murder by an intimate partner is the leading cause of death among African American women between the ages of 15 and 45. In addition, 10% to 20% of African American women were found to suffer from IPV. That rate increases during pregnancy, illness, and aging (Valente, 2002). According to Lettie and Danis (2010), community violence, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, has been commonly cited among the reasons why IPV occurs in African American neighborhoods.

Structural disadvantages also contribute to the impact of IPV within the African American community. Lettie and Danis (2010) noted that African American communities making below \$5,999 or less annually are more likely to experience IPV than communities above that income range. Williams, Oliver, and Pope (2008) found that high rates of unemployment, alcohol and drug use, and exposure to violence in the family and community are risk factors associated with IPV in African American communities.

Reed et al, (2009) examined neighborhood levels of street or gang violence, perception of violence and survival strategies as contributors to perpetration of IPV among males ages 18 to 65. Their research showed that, although literature states that low socio-economic backgrounds influence male propensity to seek control over women in their environment, other factors such as neighborhood violence and substance abuse have substantial influence in risk for IPV (Reed et al, 2009). In addition, Bent-Goodley (2004) cited that, although past research attributes poverty as a prime factor for

determining the likelihood of IPV in an African American community, there is also a disproportionate likelihood that middle-class African American women are likely to face IPV when compared to middle-class White women.

#### Early Childhood Trauma and IPV

Wyatt (2000) conducted a survey to investigate the relationship between child abuse, traumatic events and HIV status in the continuation of verbal and physical forms of IPV suffered by African American women. Through interviews with 135 African American women ages 19-61, this study showed that women who experienced child abuse were more likely to experience partner violence as adults (Wyatt, 2000). West (2004) also stated that multiple traumatic experiences, including childhood trauma, are linked to negative physical and psychological effects with partner violence. According to Lettie and Danis (2010), African American children who experience high rates of trauma due to sexual or physical abuse may be more vulnerable to domestic abuse than children who do not experience these forms of abuse. African American women may react to their victimizations as trauma and react to it as adaptation. This depends on many factors; however, growing up in a violent community is considered one factor (Lettie & Danis, 2010).

#### Historical Racism and Female Subordination in African American Communities

According to Lettie and Danis (2010), IPV can be traced in the African American community since slavery. During African American people's enslavement, there were high rates of sexual violence toward African American women. Violence against African American women was used to control their bodies, strip them of their autonomy, and to determine their personal relationships (Lettie, 2010; West, 2004). West (2004) further

posited that White men in the antebellum South acted out their sexual desires freely on African American women. In fact, White men viewed themselves as victims of African American female lust represented through the portrayal of African American women as immoral “Jezebels” or through stereotypes of African American women as insatiable sexual beings who seduced their master (West, 2004). Historically, African Americans were unable to charge White men for rape or for any crime, making it impossible for African American women to have any public recourse for sexual violation (Lettie, 2010; West, 2004).

Wyckoff and Simpson (2008) argued that contemporary stereotypes of African American women as matriarchal, independent, and strong can influence the way they respond to IPV and the ways their perpetrators respond to them. African American women do not conform to societal expectations of female victimhood, such as being passive and fragile (Wyckoff & Simpson, 2008). In the case of the stereotype of African American woman as matriarchal, African American women may hold on to its symbol of strength and resilience even at the expense of their own well-being. Wyckoff and Simpson suggested that the attacker may also internalize stereotypes of African American women as likely to fight back. In these cases, abusers may increase the severity of the assault to ensure the success of their attack. Conwill (2010) stated that racialized stereotypes in low-income African American communities of African American women as “Black Venus,” a colloquial equivalent to Jezebel or a woman of low moral character are risk factors that contribute to IPV. The Black Venus stereotype represents the image of African American women as primitive and excessive in her sexuality (Conwill, 2010).

## Victim Blaming in African American Communities

Morrison, Lukhok, and Richter. (2006) conducted a study in which the African American women stated that being seen as loud and emasculating was generally accepted in the African American community; and, by extension, African American women deserve the abuse because of their unfeminine behavior. In addition, the African American women they interviewed stated that some African Americans believed that IPV was so common in the African American community that it is to be expected (Morrison et al., 2006). African American women in the study also stated that the African American community at large considers victims of IPV to be “stupid” for remaining in violent relationships or that they must have caused the abuse (Morrison et al., 2006).

According to Hampton, Oliver and Magarian (2003), negative attitudes in the African American community toward IPV victims tend to inhibit African American women from seeking out help or leaving the abusive relationship because they women may rather deal with pain of abuse than endure negative judgments. Morrison et al (2006) also stated that African American women fear ridicule, being labeled, and criticism. Furthermore, Wyckoff and Simpson (2008) asserted that, often times, African Americans in general, and African American women in particular, feel that part of being African American is silently dealing with problems of abuse within the family. In other words, based on particular African American cultural contexts, being African American and being abused cannot coexist. Choosing to report abuse or to be outspoken about it to the community is to choose to be an abused person over being African American (Wyckoff & Simpson, 2008). Richie (2010) similarly claimed that African American women feel pressured to live up to various roles which include feeling obligated to buffer

families from impact of racism. As a result, African American women are pressured to withstand abuse more than other members in the household (Richie, 2010).

### African American Women, IPV, and Support Systems

Through conducting interviews within focus groups, Gillum (2008) found that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with the services African American women receive in an attempt to escape their abusive partner because of racism and a lack of culturally competency. Bent-Goodly (2004) examines the multiple perceptions of IPV by African American women. After a study on the ways African American women perceive IPV, participants of the groups stated that IPV and abuse were two different phenomena with the latter being more serious (Bent-Goodly, 2004). Members thought there needs to be culturally-competent public education that addresses the seriousness of IPV and the availability of more accessible services for African American women who experience IPV (Bent-Goodly, 2004).

According to Hodges and Cabanilla (2011), African Americans are unlikely to seek out traditional forms of support for IPV such as shelters and counseling services. Instead, African Americans rely heavily on informal sources for support such as family and friends. However, African American women who were shown to have strong resiliency, spirituality, and education levels were likely to seek traditional help (Hodges & Cabanilla, 2011). Gillum (2008) also found that African American women with higher religious involvement also had higher psychological well-being and decreased depression. Morrison et al. (2006) interviewed 15 African American women who identified as survivors of physical abuse to study the benefits and challenges that African American women have when seeking help from informal networks. Morrison et al.

found that families and friends were willing to offer tangible aid such as child care, transportation, and shelter, as well as guidance and advice on the relationship. However, the women also stated that emotional support was lacking. Some family members did not want to get involved in personal affairs and family and friends may have been frustrated or lacked empathy (Morrison et al., 2006).

### Institutional Racism and Its Impact on IPV in African American Communities

Stereotypes of African American men and women also play a unique role in the perception and perpetuation of IPV in African American communities (Conwill, 2010; Gillum, 2002; Hampton et al., 2003). Hampton et al. (2003) stated that the history of institutional racism contributes to IPV in the African American community as more common and violent than in White communities. They found that African American men experience intense frustrations toward racial prejudice and institutional barriers that block them from having equal access to socioeconomic privileges. Gender violence results as accumulated anger and hatred of African American men due to institutional racism and is displaced onto wives and loved ones (Hampton et al., 2003).

Hampton et al. (2003) also referenced high rates of African American male joblessness and dependency of African American women to the welfare system as structural factors linked to gender violence. Rigid sex-role perceptions have also been associated with a greater acceptance of IPV among both African Americans men and women (Lettie, 2010; Richie, 2012). Smith (2008) analyzed the ways race shapes the experiences of African American men who commit violence against women. The findings reveal that African American men who witnessed their father beat their mothers were likely to commit violent acts against their partners as well (Smith, 2008). In

addition, African American men with limited employment opportunities are likely to release their frustrations on their partners because their masculinity was threatened for not being able to provide for their families (Smith, 2008).

### Institutional Racism and the Stereotyping of African American Masculinity

Harris (2000) examined hegemonic White masculinity as glorified in U.S. culture and occupying order-giving positions in the political and economic institutions. African American men are “emasculated” by hegemonic White masculinity, being denied access to the same kind of hegemonic masculinity regardless of whether or not they possess aggressive qualities. African American men seek alternative definitions of manhood because they have historically lacked the resources to institutionalize the subordination of women in the same manner as White men (Harris, 2000).

Some of these alternative masculinities can be referenced to subcultures that use toughness in their interaction with other men and exploitation of women (Harris, 2000). In response, Harris (2003) contended that African American men constructed their own hyper-masculinity that allows them to feel superior to their White counterparts or their wealthier counterparts in other ways, such as through sexual prowess or physical strength. African American hyper-masculinity has provided them with social status.

Such forms of African American masculinity have often been defined as uniquely violent by hegemonic White masculinity (Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacey, & Marghi, 2008; Harris, 2000). African American males have been portrayed in scientific and popular culture as more prone to violence than their White middle class counterparts (Hampton et al., 2008). These portrayals have largely been attributed to how African American males react to social pressures in under-class urban communities heavy in crime and social

dysfunction (Hampton et al., 2008). The hypervisibility of prominent African American males since the 1960s, which include Malcom X, Muhammad Ali, and Huey Newton gave national attention to African American masculinity as violent and uncontrollable (Hampton et al.,2008). African American males may respond to these perceptions in the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy, such as assuming the persona of a “thug” (Hampton et al., 2008).

MacDowell (2013) also argued in her research that, in addition to stereotypes that influence who is recognized as an IPV victim, it is also important to understand what stereotypes create the recognizable perpetrator. Intersectionality, as defined by MacDowell, indicates the ways in which experiences are shaped by the interaction of multiple identity categories. For African American men, their masculine attributes are considered animalistic, crime-prone, and sexually unrestrained. Their only way to combat this would be to become the “good black man” in which they assimilate to White customs and downplay their race and masculinity. However, this contributes to the dichotomy of good African American men and bad African American men, which further justifies their criminalization (MacDowell, 2013).

#### Media, Celebrities, and the Stereotype of the Violent African American Man

The impact of media and celebrities also contributes to the public’s understanding of African American masculinity and its relationship to IPV. Maxwell, Huxford, Borum, and Hornik (2000) found that although the case of O.J. Simpson increased the story coverage of IPV -related issues, in general, coverage of IPV eventually withered away. They also showed that celebrity involvement in IPV demonstrates to the public that IPV has real consequences for everyone (Maxwell et al., 2000). In the case of O.J. Simpson,



in particular, extensive media coverage contributed to the overall perception of African American men as violent (Maxwell et al., 2000). Moreover, Griffin's (2013) case study of *State of Indiana v. Michael G. Tyson* revealed that public discourse during the trial combined with Tyson's celebrity status positioned African American female survivors as deserving of gender violence (Griffin, 2013). In addition, Griffin asserted that, through posing Tyson as "crazy," society at large excuses itself for perpetuating violence against African American women through dismissal and indifference.

### The Construction of Colorblind Rhetoric

In addition to overt racist stereotypes and depictions of people of color, researchers have also analyzed the ways racism manifests itself through colorblind rhetoric, or the rehearsal of the claim that different races do not exist among humans (Anagnostopoulos, 2013; Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gottlieb, 2013). According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), colorblind language operates through the following ways: (1) attaching life successes and shortcomings to meritocracy and individuality; (2) believing that racial segregation was a natural consequence with no historical, political, or cultural considerations; and (3) believing that race has become an irrelevant subject since the civil rights movement. In addition, according to Gottlieb's (2013) theory of colorblind rhetoric, discussions of race-centered issues upsets a silent consensus that race should not influence public discourse. Gottlieb's theory demonstrates that, in addition to the belief that race is irrelevant in contemporary society, race also remains to be an uncomfortable topic for members of society to discuss.

Apfelbaum et al.'s study (2008) on colorblind rhetoric further shows that denying the perception of race has more strategic uses among White people. According to

Apfelbaum et al., White people adopt a strategy of colorblindness when placed within race-relevant social interactions to avoid the appearance of bias, despite research that demonstrates the ability of White people to perceive racial difference.

Anagnostopoulos's study (2013) further expands on the tactical usage of colorblind rhetoric by stating that it is also employed through de-contextualizing speech and action from political, social, and historical events. This is done by emphasizing that the intention of people is unknowable and cannot not be determined through using understandings of how race operates in the United States.

### Social Media and the Importance of Twitter

#### The Popularity of Twitter

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter has been a popular, convenient microblogging platform that allows for users to instantaneously post a short comment on a current or past event, ranging from a comment about their day to a social or political commentary (S. Williams et al, 2013). Pak and Paroubek (2011) explained that the amount of text posts about opinions is ever-growing, and Twitter users range from everyday citizens, celebrities, CEOs, and politicians. In addition, the public is likely to use social media for social support, vent emotions about an incident and spread opinions about the incident to friends (Snoeijsers, Poels, and Nicolay, 2014). The convenience in accessing Twitter on mobile devices as well as its popularity has made it one of the most widely used social networking services and richest data source on public opinion (S. Williams et al., 2013).

#### Uses of Twitter

There have been several attempts for researchers to explain why people use twitter. Pak and Paroubek (2011) explained that Twitter is rich with data that contains

people's opinions about various topics. They explained that this is a platform with an ever-growing amount of text posts about opinions ranging from everyday citizens, celebrities, CEOs, and politicians (Pak and Paroubek, 2011). In addition, studies showed that traditional media outlets such as newspapers are seen as more credible sources for information. Rather, the public is likely to use social media for social support, to vent emotions about an incident and to spread opinions about the incident to friends (Snoeijers, Poels, and Nicolay, 2014).

#### Analyzing Public Sentiment on Twitter

Researchers have used various methodologies for detecting and analyzing sentiment in blogs and microblogs (Kouloumpis, Wilson, & Moore, 2011; Pak & Paroubek, 2011). For example, Pak and Paroubek (2011) used Twitter specifically to analyze public sentiments through microblogging sites. The authors collected a corpus of 300,000 text posts and conducted a linguistic analysis, creating a method to analyze positive, negative, and objective sentiments (2010). Furthermore, Kouloumpis et al. (2011) conducted study using Twitter hashtags as well as emoticons to identify sentiments, finding that both are useful for emotional classification. Their determination of which method is more useful was inconclusive.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Research Design

The research design consisted of a qualitative content analysis that utilized an iterative approach. According to Berg (2001), content analysis consists of techniques for objectively making inferences of messages conveyed in data. Through initially developing inductive categories based on themes that appear to be meaningful to the producers of each tweet, this technique provided a method for understanding how authors of tweets view their social worlds. Iterative analysis “alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories” (Tracy, 2013, p.184). Through iterative analysis, the grounding of data included a reflective process in which the codes were modified to best define emergent data. After all emergent data was accounted for, patterns and connections amongst data was developed using existing disciplinary concepts and theories to address key research questions.

#### Sampling and Data Collection

The sample consisted of tweets that contained the hashtag “#RayRice”. The data obtained from tweets was collected from Twitter.com during two 1-week periods centralized at the time of two key events; (1) NFL announcement of a two-game

suspension of Ray Rice on July 24, 2014 and (2) NFL announcement of an indefinite suspension of Ray Rice on September 8, 2014.

Because of the dramatic difference between the number of tweets between the first 3 days previous to and the first 3 days following each event, a different sampling strategy was used for the first three days versus the last 3 days for each week period. For the 3 days before the event of July 24, 2014 and September 8, 2014, each and every tweet was included in the sample. For the 3 days following the event of July 24, 2014 and September 8, 2014, the following strategy was used. The first 10 tweets of each hour between the hours of 12:00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m. was sampled. This sampling approach was the most feasible approach for the researcher given the number of tweets, the time and resources available and the chronological way in which the tweets were available. Choosing hours were during normal waking hours for each time zone in the United States was taken into consideration. The following represents the time periods sampled.

Sample at T1a: All tweets that contained the hashtag #rayrice from July 21, 2014 to July 23, 2014.

Sample at T1b: The first 10 tweets of each hour between 12:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. that contained the hashtag #rayrice from July 25, 2014 to July 27, 2014.

Sample at T2a: All tweets that contained the hashtag #rayrice from September 5, 2014 to September 7, 2014.

Sample at T2b: The first 10 tweets of each hour between 12:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. that contained the hashtag #rayrice from September 9, 2014 to September 11, 2014.

For this study, 332 tweets were sampled using the hashtag #RayRice. Figure 1 shows that of the 332 tweets, a total of 300 tweets were analyzed with 32 (10.7%)

regarded as error because they were spam or otherwise completely unrelated (see Figure 1 in Appendix A). Figure 1 also shows that for the total number of valid tweets, 5 (1.67%) were valid for T1a, 139 (46.3%) were valid for T1b, 20 (6.67%) were valid for T2a, and 136 (45.3%) were valid for T2b (see Figure 1 in Appendix A).

### Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability was addressed by having another professional researcher (thesis advisor) review the procedures step by step.

### Data Analysis

The primary-cycle coding phase and qualitative data collected from tweets occurred simultaneously. During the primary-cycle coding phase, first-level codes, or words and phrases that were merely descriptive and solely focus on “what” is present in the data, were assigned to data to capture their essence (Tracy 2013, p.189). This process also consisted of a constant comparative method in which the codes was consistently reflected upon and modified to best fit emergent data. Data from tweets was fractured into multiple codes and connected into larger categories during the later coding cycles.

The second-cycle analytic and hierarchical coding phase began after the primary-cycle process. The second-cycle coding process served to explain, theorize, and synthesize codes and identify any significant patterns (Tracy 2013). The codes were systematically grouped together under hierarchical “umbrella” categories that made conceptual sense. These categories drew from disciplinary concepts of feminist theories on gendered violence. Links were then made to address key questions. A systematic codebook was developed to keep a manual record and to provide a visual for both coding phases.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Overview

Chapter 4 is divided into three sections; sample data, themes, and conclusion. The first section of the chapter describes the sample data. The second section discusses the emergent themes focusing on the seriousness of IPV and the assignment of accountability. The third section concludes the main findings.

#### Sample Data

The Ray Rice/Janay Rice incident has drawn Twitter traffic that reached the height of global statistics for 2014 (<http://tt-history.appspot.com/>). This suggests the social importance of the incident, and it also raises the challenges of sampling. In fact, Twitter traffic varied greatly from the time that the incident first became public and has surged as various news events related to the initial incident have been covered by the media, waning again as events have faded from public attention. This study does not analyze the entire timeline of events, but rather focuses on two time periods centering on events that prompted a large number of tweets. These events were preceded by dramatically lower Twitter traffic even though the Ray Rice/Janay Rice incident was still on the public radar. For example, of the tweets that used hashtag #rayrice, there were only 30 tweets total posted three days before September 08, 2014, but 84,600 tweets were posted on September 08 and 74,215 tweets were posted on September 09 (data retrieved

from <http://rs.peoplebrowsr.com/>). Results of the total number of tweets using the hashtag #rayrice during July 24, 2014 and subsequent dates are not available, but the increase in the number of overall hashtags was still noticeable as indicated in visual figures available publicly (<http://tt-history.appspot.com/>).

### Themes

Content analysis revealed two primary themes related to IPV. The first theme indicates whether the tweets reflected seriousness about IPV or, on the contrary, a lack of seriousness or dismissiveness about IPV. The second theme addresses the assignment of accountability to certain institutions or individuals. These generally divided into assignment of accountability to institutions, that is, the National Football League (NFL) or ESPN, the news outlet most identified with publicity regarding IPV between Ray Rice and Janay Rice. Assignment of accountability was also categorized by identification of Ray Rice as being accountable or blameworthy regarding IPV or Janay Rice as being most identified as being responsible for the IPV or claims made about IPV.

### Seriousness of IPV

The sampled tweets reflected public sentiment regarding whether or not they appeared to consider IPV to be a serious issue. Tweets were categorized into those that considered IPV as (1) serious; (2) not serious; or (3) those that did not indicate an opinion regarding seriousness. Figure 2 (See Appendix B) shows that for the two time periods, 101 (33.7%) of total tweets deemed IPV to be serious; 97 (33.3%) of total tweets showed a lack of seriousness; and 102 (34.0%) of total tweets did not clearly reflect an opinion regarding consideration of the seriousness of IPV.



IPV as serious. Seriousness was categorized primarily by sentiments showing some form of clear negative sentiment with regard to the IPV. This opinion was mostly expressed by concern about the need for broader cultural change, inadequate actions of the NFL or the violent behavior of Ray Rice. Tweets that voiced sentiments regarding the seriousness of IPV most clearly expressed the sentiment in at least one of three categories: “cultural change,” “NFL consequence,” and “crime.”

Figure 3 (See Appendix C) shows the distribution of types of seriousness by week. Tweets could fall into more than one category. Of the 101 tweets that expressed seriousness, the majority of total tweets expressed demands for more general societal or cultural change regarding IPV ( $n = 75$ ; 74.3%). The second category of tweets demanded that the NFL should have imposed greater consequences for the handling of IPV ( $n = 19$ ; 18.8%). Identification of IPV as a crime was the least common expression of seriousness ( $n = 5$ , 5.0%).

Table 1 represents examples of tweets by categories of cultural change, NFL consequence, and IPV as a crime. Tweets that expressed “cultural change” pointed to concerns that could be interpreted as indicting broader popular attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding IPV or gender inequality, more broadly. Tweets that expressed “NFL consequence” were composed of statements that suggested that the NFL as an organization or an official of the NFL should have taken IPV more seriously. Tweets that expressed “crime” suggested that perpetration of IPV as a crime that should have legal consequences.

TABLE 1. Example of Tweets Expressing Seriousness by Type

TYPE OF SERIOUSNESS	EXAMPLE OF TWEETS
Cultural Change	Looking forward to being on the @MarkDavis show tomorrow AM to talk about #RayRice. It's not just about the #NFL. Time for cultural change.  Its 2014 people and we still "hate" women and African Americans. No wonder we're viewed as "Ugly Americans" #RayRice #DannyFerry
NFL Consequence	Goodell should resign effective immediately #rayrice  How has the @NFL not fired Roger Goodell yet? Nothing he said in the wake of the #RayRice video makes any sense #prfail
Crime	#Ravens #RayRice Mistake, my ass. A mistake is an error in your check book. Knocking out a woman in a domestic dispute is a Crime.  What #RayRice did was totally wrong but why must we expect a tougher punishment from his employer #NFL than the courts #USJusticeSystem

IPV as not serious. Tweets that indicated an opinion that IPV was not a serious issue or not one deeming public attention were categorized as “not serious.” The types of non-serious sentiments that emerged as those expressing some form of “minimization” of the seriousness of IPV, indication of IPV as a “private over public” matter, and opinions that the public should “move on.”

Figure 4 (See Appendix D) shows the distribution of types of non-serious tweets by week. “Minimization” was the most widely used form of non-serious tweets ( $n=67$ , 69.1%), followed by “private over public” ( $n = 19$ ; 19.6%). “Move on” was the category tweeted the least ( $n = 11$ ; 11.3%).

Table 2 offers examples of tweets in each topic category. “Minimization” was a common way that tweets implied or expressed that IPV was not a serious issue or that the Ray Rice IPV incident was not considered serious. Tweets within the category of “minimization” were further categorized into subtopics: “jokes,” “deflection,” and “rationalization” to capture the variety of ways tweets minimized the impact of IPV.

Figure 5 (See Appendix E) illustrates the distribution of types of “minimization” by week. The expression of a “joke” was used the most ( $n = 37$ ; 55.2%), and used most often during week one. “Deflection” was used less ( $n = 18$ ; 26.9%) but used more than “rationalization” ( $n = 13$ ; 19.4%). Table 2 provides examples of minimizing tweets by each category.

Minimizing through “jokes” appeared to create amusement out of the incident between Ray Rice and Janay Rice through the use of punchlines. “Minimizing” was also used in the form of “deflection,” or utilizing a hypothetical scenario, comparison, or other existing event that diverts attention from the incident between Ray Rice and Janay Rice. “Minimizing” was also expressed through “rationalization,” or statements that focus on why Ray Rice may have legitimately had reason to commit violence against Janay Rice.

Other non-serious tweets were included in the category “private over public,” which expressed that IPV is a private matter that should remain out of the domain of the NFL or the public. “Move on” was another category of tweets that suggested matters regarding the incident between Ray Rice and Janay Rice are outdated or should no longer be of concern.

TABLE 2. Example of Tweets Expressing Non-Seriousness

TYPE OF NON-SERIOUSNESS	EXAMPLE OF TWEETS
Minimization	
Jokes	<p>#RayRice ‘I told everyone before we were engaged she was a #knockout’ What’s the problem? #Ravens</p> <p>#RayRice needa try out for boxing</p>
Deflection	<p>WhyIStayed #whyileft #RayRice Didn’t see these tweets when Jay-Z got assaulted #ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness.</p> <p>#rayrice would have started the attack and his gf knocked him out, women would be praising her for defending herself. Double standards.”</p>
Rationalization	<p>#RayRice she deserved that hit no boy saw she hit him 3 times then he backed up and she walked up to him and hit him #selfdefense.</p> <p>#RayRice The Law of Cause and Effect vs the law of action and reaction [link]</p>
Private over Public	<p>@ebperry #RayRice all should #mindyourbusiness myself included</p> <p>Why is everyone blaming the #NFL for what #RayRice did. It’s not their job 2 investigate it. That’s between him, her &amp; police...</p>
Move On	<p>Heard if #RayRice fiancee married him that she is ok w/what” happened &amp; every1 should move on. #Bullshit #WeROurSistersKeepers.</p> <p>#ISIS speech from Obama soon and most of you still talking about #RayRice.... Put powder on your hand and slap yourself #HowHigh style</p>

### Accountability Assigned

The sampled tweets also reflected public opinion regarding what institution or individual should be accountable for IPV. Figure 6 (Appendix F) shows that of the 300 tweets, less than half of tweets ( $n = 114$ , 38.0%) assigned accountability to either an organization or individual. Tweets that assigned accountability were categorized as (1) NFL; (2) ESPN; (3) Ray Rice; or (4) Janay Rice.

Figure 7 (See Appendix G) shows the distribution of accountability per time period. Of the 300 tweets that assigned accountability to an institution, 54 (18.0%) of tweets assigned accountability to the NFL and 12 (4.00%) of tweets assigned accountability to ESPN. Of the 300 tweets that assigned accountability to an individual, 35 (11.7%) of tweets assigned accountability to Ray Rice and 13 (4.33%) of tweets assigned accountability to Janay Rice. Finally, of the 300 tweets, more than half of tweets ( $n = 186$ ; 62.0%) did not explicitly assign accountability.

Table 3 provides examples of tweets that assigned accountability. The table is divided into tweets assigning accountability to the institutions of the NFL or ESPN and individuals including Ray Rice and Janay Rice.

NFL is accountable. With regard to the ways tweets expressed that the NFL should be held accountable, some tweets said that the NFL, as an institution, had the responsibility of suspending Ray Rice from the NFL longer than two games. Tweets that indicated NFL accountability challenged why the NFL had harsher punishments for less severe actions than IPV. Another segment of tweets referenced doubts in the NFL's

support for women’s rights and suggested that the NFL should show their support by being more accountable.

TABLE 3. Example of Tweets Expressing Accountability by Type

WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE	EXAMPLE OF TWEETS
<b>Institutions:</b>	
NFL	<p>The way the #NFL &amp; Goodell are "handling" this #RayRice situation is insulting, sending the message that DV is worth a slap on the wrist</p> <p>Fact the NFL needs to get their priorities in order #Suspension #RayRice Smokes Weed: 1 Year Suspension. Hits wife: 2 games</p> <p>What does #NFL risk by standing up for women? Are the few who support #RayRice's behavior suddenly going to stop being fans? #greatergood</p>
ESPN	<p>@stephenasmith I'm "provoked" to unfollow you. #RayRice #domesticviolence #noexcuseforabuse.</p> <p>Shame on @espn and most your reporters 4 the #rayrice #nfl love fest. Be real men and stand up for women instead of that nflmoney #shameful</p>
<b>Individuals:</b>	
Ray Rice	<p>@DanielleDjones I do support the call for #RayRice to suspended for the #NFL. But I think a lifetime ban is excessive. I think a 2-5 year ban</p> <p>What about jail time for Ray Rice, can it happen? Will it? [link] #domesticviolence #assault #RayRice</p>
Janay Rice	<p>She probably deserved it #Rayrice</p> <p>Abuse of women should not be tolerated by NFL \$ his gf, who is now his wife, is insane for marrying him. He will abuse her again! #RayRice</p> <p>Married #RayRice anyway. Woman w/ flawed upbringing realizing only phys discipline keeps her frm acting the fool, or worse? #NotTheCosbyShow."</p>

ESPN is accountable. Of those tweets assigning accountability to an institution, a few tweets ( $n = 12$ , 4.0%) expressed that ESPN should be held accountable for their involvement in the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incident. Most tweets that addressed ESPN referenced disappointment in the ways talk show host commentators address the incident. Tweets referencing disappointment conveyed the idea that, although accountability did not heavily fall on ESPN for protocol, ESPN as an organization. The example in Table 4 refers to comments referring to Stephen Smith, an ESPN talk show host.

The number of tweets that held Ray Rice accountable for the incident was 35 (11.7%). The degree of accountability for Ray and the type of accountability toward him varied greatly. Tweets expressed varying degrees of NFL punishments, ranging from half a season, a year, two-five year suspension, and indefinite suspension. Other tweets included demands for arrest. Another segment of tweets used negative labeling of Ray Rice to imply accountability for hitting Janay Rice. While some tweets expressed harsher degrees of accountability, other tweets expressed the opinion that Ray Rice should be held accountable but at a lower level of consequence.

Janay Rice is accountable. Relatively few tweets ( $n = 13$ , 4.33%) expressed that Janay Rice should be held accountable for her actions before, during, and after the incident. Of these tweets, some stated that Janay Rice should not have provoked Ray Rice and that she deserved being hit. Other tweets stated that Janay Rice should be held accountable by making the decision to marry Ray Rice.

## Conclusion

The research found emergent themes that could be categorized into two thematic areas. One theme was whether the tweets reflected IPV as a serious issue or one that could be minimized or dismissed. The other was whether accountability was assigned and, if so, to whom. The categories of serious tweets were divided into those that focused on criticism of the NFL's inadequate handling of the Ray Rice incident, the need for a broader cultural change regarding IPV, and tweets that felt that IPV is a crime. Most tweets that reflected seriousness about IPV were those that advocated for cultural change. Categories of non-serious tweets included minimization of IPV, emphasis on IPV as a private over a public matter, and advocacy for moving on from IPV.

The research also demonstrated that tweets that assigned accountability or responsibility for IPV variously focused on the NFL, ESPN, Ray Rice, and Janay Rice as institutions or individuals that should be held accountable for the IPV incident. The NFL and Ray Rice had the highest number of tweets that held them accountable whereas ESPN as an institution and Janay Rice, the victim of IPV, had the least amount of tweets that held them accountable.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand different sentiments expressed about IPV in the form of tweets through a content analysis on tweets. Research questions included: (1) What public sentiments of IPV emerge from the Ray Rice/Janay Rice incident? (2) What public perceptions of IPV victimization and accountability are elucidated in the Ray Rice/Janay Rice incident? (3) How does the level of consequence imposed on the perpetrator of violence, Ray Rice, influence public perceptions of IPV victimization and accountability? This chapter is organized into the following sections: discussion, limitations, implications for social work policy, practice, and advocacy, and recommendations for future research.

#### Discussion

The incident of Ray Rice and Janay Rice provides an opportunity to witness the importance of social media in both shaping and reflecting popular sentiment about IPV and a significant entertainment institution in the United States, the NFL. With only 140 character per tweet, people expressed sentiments through narrative, creative use of hashtags, links to more substantive articles or calls to action, and re-tweets, often accompanied by a brief endorsement or lack thereof. With #RayRice being a trending topic within the three days following the two-day suspension and within the three days

following the indefinite suspension, the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incident was an emotional event for the public. Emotions ranged from frustration to disgust by the actions or inactions of the NFL, Ray Rice, and Janay Rice. Other tweets dismissed the event or the public attention entirely, using humor and minimization to suggest that the public turn elsewhere.

### NFL as an Institution

One clear central theme in the tweets was the overwhelming debate over the character and role of the NFL in the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incident. Some tweets questioned whether a two-day suspension of Ray Rice demonstrated that the NFL is a patriarchal institution. Several tweets debated whether a sport organization is even responsible for dealing with “private” matters like IPV. Another set of tweets discussed whether the NFL should serve as a model for how to deal with the behavior of its players. Regardless, when the NFL did take significant public action first in the form of a two-day suspension and next in the form of an indefinite suspension, the sheer number of tweets shows that the public did react.

### Gender

IPV is primarily considered a gender-based offense in the United States (M. Johnson, 2011; Richie, 2012; Stark, 2007). Even if gender was not explicitly addressed in a tweet, gender is often a subtext (M. Johnson, 2011; Richie, 2012; Stark, 2007). Not surprisingly, tweets that did assign accountability to an individual pointed to Ray Rice as the perpetrator of violence. What was surprising to the researcher was the low numbers of tweets that blamed Janay Rice or even mentioned her at all perhaps reflecting that

cultural change regarding IPV and supportive attitudes towards victims have already been a powerful force.

Despite the few tweets that did voice an opinion about Janay Rice, it is interesting to note how the portrayal of Ray Rice stands in stark contrast to the sentiment regarding Janay Rice. While tweets addressing Ray Rice or assigning blame tended to be direct, tweets about Janay Rice tended to use hypotheticals, portraying how the tweeter might act if in a similar situation. In this indirect way, they passed judgment on decisions made by Janay Rice.

These attitudes, though few in number in this sample, align with research on the public understanding of victim-blaming (Esqueda & Harrison, 2005; Yamawaki, 2012). The tweets that assigned accountability to Janay Rice suggested that she provoked her husband or that she desired abuse if she chose to remain in a relationship with him. Victim-blaming attitudes embedded in tweets also expand on Stark's (2007) notion that women who face severe physical attacks are constructed as deserving victims.

### Race

This research was motivated by a concern about the intersection of gender and race regarding the issue of IPV. However, there were only a few tweets that referred to the subject of race or made possible racial connotations despite research that illustrated a connection between African American stereotypes and IPV (Conwill, 2010; Wyckoff and Simpson, 2008). One interpretation of this is that race was not an important factor in public interpretations of this incident. Another interpretation is that the sample of tweets revealed possible efforts to avoid race or reflect a more politically correct attitude. Such an avoidance falls in line with research on gender essentialism within the feminist

movement addressing IPV in which the emphasis on gender, in fact, is said to hide the very real dynamics of race within the public discourse on IPV (Richie, 2012). Similarly, Anagnostopoulos's (2013) research on the ways colorblind rhetoric is employed in different situational contexts could explain the relatively hidden aspects of race in the content of these tweets. Despite the inconclusive findings about gender and race, this research offers the opportunity to understand how sports and social media come together to shape and reflect public sentiment on the issue of IPV.

### Limitations

The study's first limitation is the sampling decisions due to the dramatic difference in size of tweets between the small numbers before the central events of the two time periods versus those post consequence dates. Sampling of the three days prior to the announcement of consequences used all tweets; those from the three days following used a systematic sampling technique. Given the constraints of time and resources, the sample size and method was the most feasible but did not use a preferable randomized sample.

Second, even among the sample size, there were several tweets in which the intended sentiment or claim of accountability could not be determined. In an attempt to develop comprehensible and objective data in which to analyze, the intended messages of these tweets were not inferred. However, many of these tweets may still have contained other meaningful messages that could also be insightful to public understandings on IPV. Conservative criteria for inference may have limited material useful to the analysis.

Third, despite research questions focused on the relationship between level of consequence and public perceptions of IPV, this research did not utilize any statistical

tests to provide results showing correlation between level of consequence and seriousness and accountability. While the descriptive statistics reveal the possibility of correlation, further statistical testing would be necessary to determine whether such relationships could be considered significant. Additionally, news events regarding the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incident occurring and publicized between the two time periods may have influenced these numbers. These include but not limited to: the release of video footage of the IPV incident to the public by TMZ.com, the marriage proposal acceptance by Janay Rice, the start of the NFL season and the passage of time, in general.

### Implications for Social Work Policy, Practice, and Advocacy

#### Policy

The public response generated from these events demonstrates the significance of IPV and the public debates over the policy role of important institutions of society such as the NFL. It also showed that is imperative for social work policy makers to understand the impact of social media on the general public and the growing importance of social workers to be involved in utilizing and analyzing social media. Future social work policies should call for proactive and prevention responses by social workers through utilization of social media.

#### Practice

These public sentiments also reflect the range of support and understanding and, on the other hand, minimizing and blame that target individuals who are victims of IPV and those who are perpetrators. News events such as the Ray Rice and Janay Rice incident bring to the fore a range of attitudes that can be supportive but also detrimental to those experiencing IPV. These attitudes may also be internalized, particularly by

victims who may either be encouraged to seek help or discouraged by the fear of negative judgments.

Professionals working with individuals, couples or families who are experiencing IPV should also consider the impact of social media in the lives of these individuals. Victims of IPV are vulnerable to facing victim-blaming attitudes from their family and their community; this research has shown that social media ironically has the potential to escalate feelings of isolation by the victim and negatively affect mental health (Mikaeili et al., 2010). In addition, it is also important to keep in mind the humanity of the perpetrator of violence, and include the perpetrator in the healing process when appropriate. Part of the NASW code of ethics requires that social workers recognize the dignity and worth of the person as well as the importance of human relationships. As a population that may especially feel deficit in both areas, IPV perpetrators may benefit from healing-focused groups that utilize evidence-based interventions to help them normally function (Eckhardt, Murphy, & Spruner, 2014).

### Advocacy

As demonstrated by tweets advocating for cultural change, social media itself is an essential tool for social workers to utilize to advocate for the clients that are affected by IPV. Part of this advocacy would include social workers continuing to demonstrate the need for awareness about IPV dynamics to help move the public from victim-blaming to victim-understanding attitudes.

It is also important for social workers to challenge colorblind rhetoric through contextualizing IPV in the system of sexism and racism. Social workers should understand IPV as an intersectional issue that is shaped deeply by the categories of

gender, race and class (Bograd, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991; Garfield, 2001; Richie, 2000; Sokoloff, 2004). While it may be true that many tweeters see IPV as an issue of gender, not one of race, it may also be the case that gender essentialism makes covert the very salient issue of race that underlies not only the characterization of IPV in the United States, but the world of sports as represented in the NFL (Richie, 2012). These factors influence the risk of IPV, social implications of IPV and resources available to intervene in and prevent this form of violence that ultimately affects us all.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

More research is needed to understand how social media can provide insights into public attitudes that reflect and shape responses to IPV. A larger scale study of the current research that also utilizes statistical tests and considers the level of video footage revealed is recommended to build on the accuracy of the findings of this research. Utilizing advanced computer algorithms to code tweets that range in the thousands, as well as a research team can also improve the volume of data analyzed and the objectivity of results (Kouloumpis et al., 2011; Pak & Paroubek, 2010). To further understand the ways social media can reveal how race plays a role in public understanding of IPV, comparative studies could be conducted that compares public reactions towards IPV perpetrators who are White versus IPV perpetrators who are people of color. Finally, more research needs to be conducted on how popular news-entertainment sites such as TMZ play a role in public understanding of IPV.







## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLED TWEETS BY TIME

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sample 1a [T1a]*	5	1.5	1.7	1.7
	Sample 1b [T1b]**	139	41.7	46.3	48.0
	Sample 2a [T2a]***	20	6.0	6.7	54.7
	Sample 2b [T2b]****	136	41.0	45.3	100.0
	Total	300	90.2	100.0	
Error*****		32	9.6		
Total		332	100.0		

\*T1a represents pre-consequence of week 1 (July 21-23, 2014)

\*\*T1b represents post-consequence of week 1 (July 25-27, 2014)

\*\*\*T2a represents pre-consequence of week 2 (September 05-07, 2014)

\*\*\*\*T2b represents post-consequence of week 2 (September 09-11, 2014)

\*\*\*\*\*Error due to spam

FIGURE 1. Distribution of sampled tweets by time.

APPENDIX B

FIGURE 2. LEVEL OF SERIOUSNESS BY TIME

	Serious, No. (%)	Non-Serious, No. (%)	No Indication, No. (%)	Total, No. (%)
Sample 1a [T1a]*	2 (40.0%)	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Sample 1b [T1b]**	59 (42.4%)	25 (18.0%)	55 (39.6%)	139 (100.0%)
Subtotal Week 1	61 (42.4%)	26 (18.1%)	57 (9.6%)	144 (100.0%)
Sample 2a [T2a]***	16 (80.0%)	4 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (100.0%)
Sample 2b [T2b]****	24 (17.6%)	67 (49.3%)	45 (33.1%)	136 (100.0%)
Subtotal Week 2	40 (25.6%)	71 (45.5%)	45 (30.8%)	156 (100.0%)
TOTAL	101 (33.7%)	97 (32.3%)	102 (34.0%)	300 (100%)

\*T1a represents pre-consequence of week 1 (July 21-23, 2014)

\*\*T1b represents post-consequence of week 1 (July 25-27, 2014)

\*\*\*T2a represents pre-consequence of week 2 (September 05-07, 2014)

\*\*\*\*T2b represents post-consequence of week 2 (September 09-11, 2014)

FIGURE 2. Level of seriousness by time.

APPENDIX C

FIGURE 3. FREQUENCIES OF APPEARANCE OF SERIOUS FOR #RAYRICE

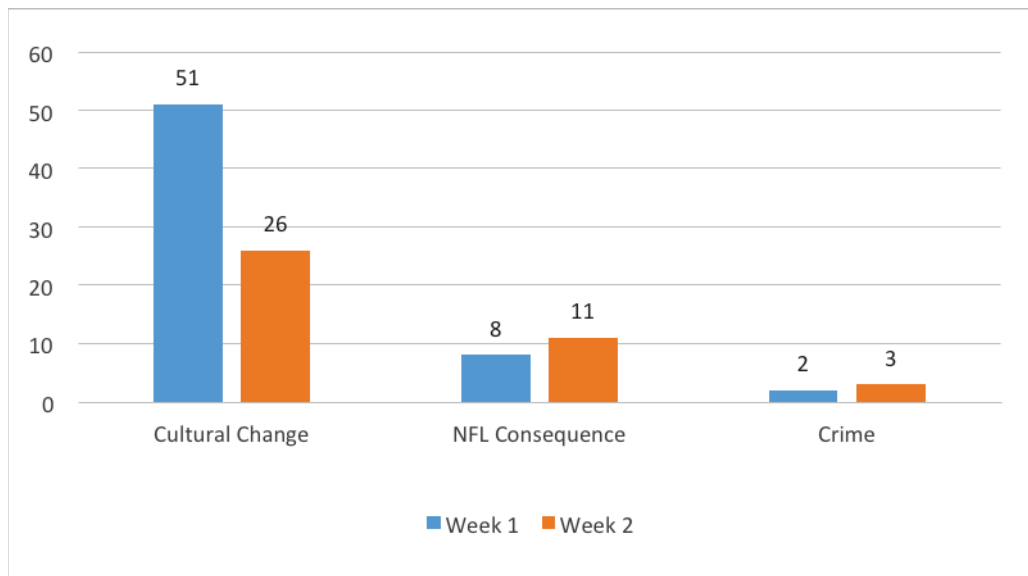


FIGURE 3. Frequencies of appearance of serious for #Rayrice.



APPENDIX D

FIGURE 4. FREQUENCIES OF APPEARANCE OF NON-SERIOUS FOR  
#RAYRICE

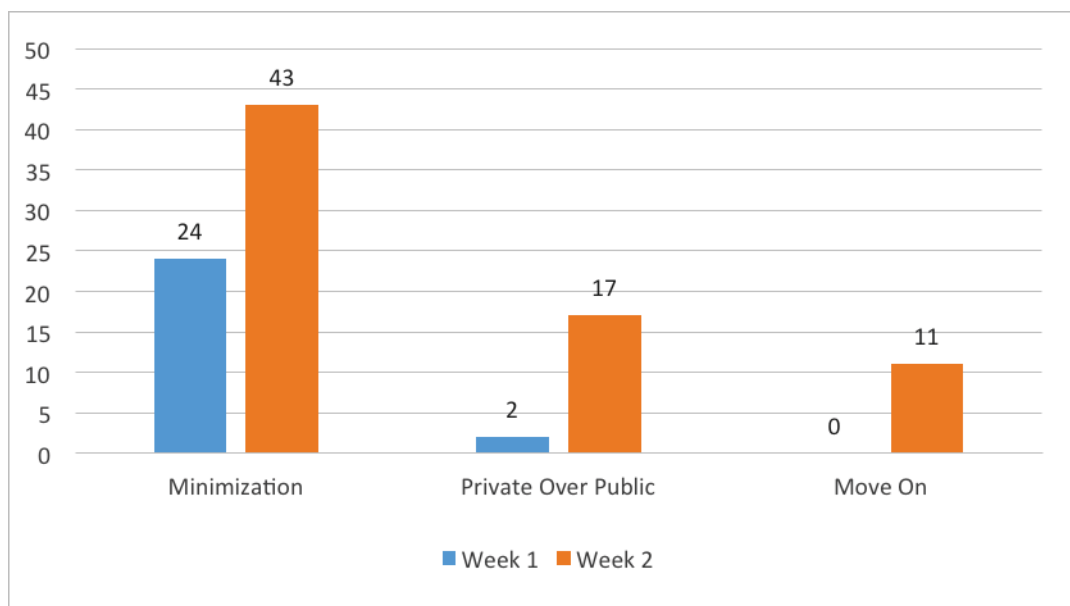


FIGURE 4. Frequencies of appearance of non-serious for #Rayrice.

APPENDIX E

FIGURE 5. FREQUENCIES OF APPEARANCE OF MINIMIZATION FOR  
#RAYRICE

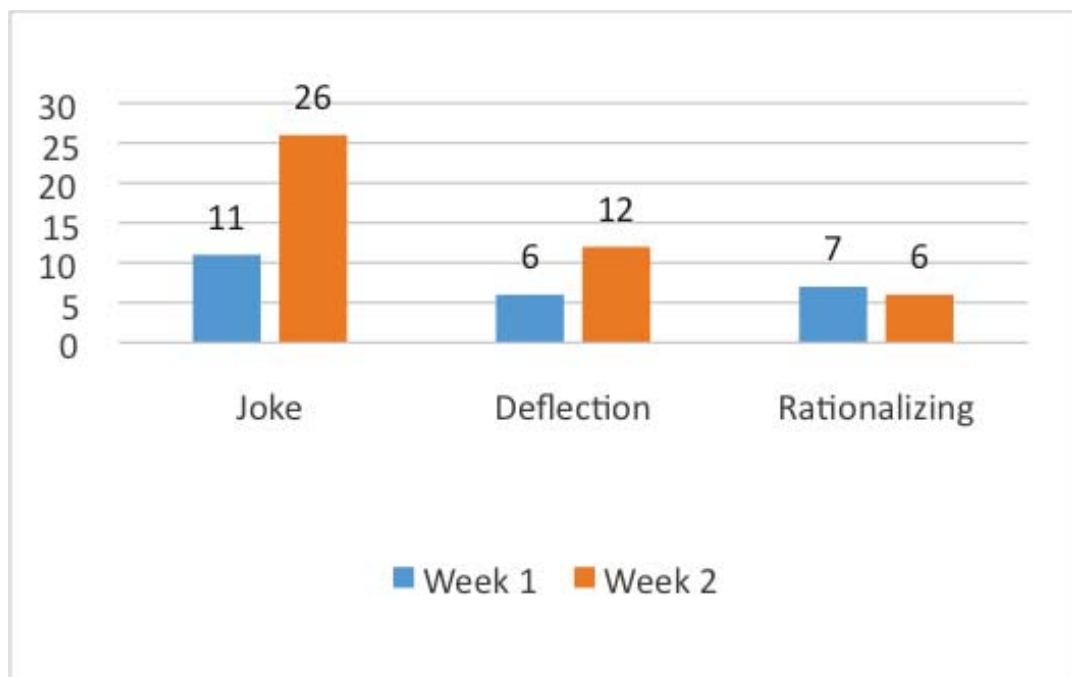


FIGURE 5. Frequencies of appearance of minimization for #RayRice.

APPENDIX F

FIGURE 6. FREQUENCIES OF ACCOUNTABILITY BY TIME

	Accountability Assigned, No. (%)	Accountability Not Assigned, No. (%)	Total
T1a*	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)	5 (100.0%)
T1b**	58 (41.7%)	81 (58.3%)	139 (100.0%)
Subtotal Week 1	61 (42.4%)	83 (57.6%)	144 (100.0%)
T2a***	16 (80.0%)	4 (20.0%)	20 (100.0%)
T2b****	37 (27.2%)	99 (72.8%)	136 (100.0%)
Subtotal Week 2	53 (34.0%)	103 (66.0%)	156 (100.0%)
TOTAL	114 (38.0%)	186 (62.0%)	300 (100%)

\*T1a represents pre-consequence of week 1 (July 21-23, 2014)

\*\*T1b represents post-consequence of week 1 (July 25-27, 2014)

\*\*\*T2a represents pre-consequence of week 2 (September 05-07, 2014)

\*\*\*\*T2b represents post-consequence of week 2 (September 09-11, 2014)

FIGURE 6. Frequencies of accountability by time.

APPENDIX G

FIGURE 7: FREQUENCIES OF ACCOUNTABILITY ASSIGNED BY TIME

	NFL, No. (%)	ESPN, No. (%)	Ray Rice, No. (%)	Janay Rice, No. (%)	Accountability Not Assigned, No. (%)	Total
T1a*	2 (40.0%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	5 (100.0%)
T1b**	27 (19.4%)	7 (5.0%)	19 (13.7%)	5 (3.6%)	81 (56.3%)	139 (100.0%)
Subtotal Week 1	29 (20.1%)	7 (4.9%)	20 (13.9%)	5 (3.5%)	83 (57.6%)	144 (100.0%)
T2a***	4 (20.0%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (60.0%)	0 (0.00%)	4 (20.0%)	20 (100.0%)
T2b****	21 (15.4%)	5 (3.7%)	3 (2.2%)	8 (5.9%)	99 (72.8%)	136 (100.0%)
Subtotal Week 2	25 (16.0%)	5 (3.2%)	15 (9.6%)	8 (5.1%)	103 (66.0%)	156 (100.0%)
TOTAL	54 (18.0%)	12 (4.00%)	35 (11.7%)	13 (4.33%)	186 (62.0%)	300 (100%)

\*T1a represents pre-consequence of week 1 (July 21-23, 2014)

\*\*T1b represents post-consequence of week 1 (July 25-27, 2014)

\*\*\*T2a represents pre-consequence of week 2 (September 05-07, 2014)

\*\*\*\*T2b represents post-consequence of week 2 (September 09-11, 2014)

FIGURE 7: Frequencies of accountability assigned by time.



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