

**WHEN MEN AND MOTHERS MURDER: A QUANTITATIVE INVESTIGATION  
INTO THE PORTRAYAL OF MALE AND FEMALE PERPETRATORS OF  
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN THE UK PRESS**

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**Abstract:** It is a well-documented fact that the media, and particularly newspapers, have an important effect on public perception of events and people. That can pose a problem, however, when implicit and explicit biases from journalists affect language choices, contributing to societal normalisation of gender stereotypes. This study aimed to investigate the linguistic gender biases exhibited in a range of different online UK news sources reporting on male and female perpetrators of Intimate Partner Homicide (IPH). I identify some themes comparable to the findings of other literature surrounding the difference in reporting, including increased kinship terminology use in relation to female subjects, higher occupational identification of male subjects, and more agency being assigned to male subjects. I therefore conclude that gender biases do exist in the UK press, and suggest that these biases should be addressed by journalists immediately if society is to move towards an attitude of equality that is not influenced by the binaries of gender stereotypes. This study provides the foundations of future research, and in my discussion of my findings I include directions that future research could take.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics, gender, sex, thematic roles, polarity, subjectivity, kinship, occupation

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Human language is a vast and powerful tool which can be utilised to convey potentially endless messages, express abstract thought and opinion, and even manipulate public opinion (Norlund, 2003). Understandably, with that power comes great responsibility, particularly when those messages, opinions, and abstract thoughts are easily accessible to billions of people worldwide – for free – via the internet.

It is unsurprising, then, that research into biases existing within the field of journalism is of the utmost importance, particularly in the case of online news sources. Gender bias in the media has been investigated several times in several different contexts, from politics (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020), to sports (Kinnick, 1998) and, of particular interest to this study, crime (Naylor, 2001). Not only is violent crime often used as a form of morbid entertainment (Dmitrieva, 2017), the nature of violent crime (and homicide specifically) inspires sensationalism from the news media. Intimate Partner Homicide (IPH), referring to the killing of one's current or ex-intimate partner (Kivisto, 2015), is a gold-mine for journalism; the shock factor of transgressive behaviour, the public obsession with sex and violence (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002), and the perceived notion of justice when sentences are served aim to satisfy the social control goal of the press (Little, 2014).

Though there is potential for suggestion that some biases observed in the language of the media are implicit, subconscious, and unintentional, I suggest it is more convincing that linguistic choices of writers are purposeful and aim to serve a wider cause<sup>1</sup>. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the differences between the portrayal of male and female perpetrators and victims of IPH in online UK newspapers.

Brennan (2009; 143) noted that “we know little about how women who commit crime are portrayed by the media”. Research has offered different explanations. Some scholars argue that the chivalry hypothesis dictates female perpetrators are treated more leniently (Grabe et al., 2006), however others suggest that the more transgressive and shocking nature of female crime elicits a harsher journalistic response (Naylor, 2001). The contrast of these viewpoints raise the question: does the UK press differ the language used when reporting on male and

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this is not to say that implicit biases are in any way less harmful or detrimental. The difference between the two has merely been discussed in this paper to highlight a difference between internalised stereotypes and biases influencing journalistic writing on a subconscious level versus a conscious, more malicious choice.

female perpetrators of IPH?

I present a different approach in an attempt to answer this question, inspired in part by studies into discrepancies in the portrayal of male and female athletes in the UK press (such as Duncan et al, 1990). Using a larger corpus of 100 articles spanning a range of different IPH cases and different online news sources, I am able to compare lexical choices connoting kinship and occupation, thematic roles, subjectivity, and polarity at sentence level. Using this method, both national and local news sources (which have often been neglected in past linguistic research in favour of in-depth analysis of one, more popular publication) could be included to gauge an overall image of the journalistic practises in the UK press. Though similar research has been conducted, this study is the first to go into such depth concerning thematic roles, subjectivity, and polarity, and I am confident in concluding that the findings of this paper contribute significant new insights to the field.

I begin by discussing previous research surrounding IPH in the media, gender roles and stereotypes, and the research inspiring each of the five areas of interest to this study. Following each area of interest, I outline the hypothesis I intend to test (indicated by [H#]). I briefly outline some of the parallels of media studies concerning both IPH and sports in order to contextualise the motivation behind this exploration and illustrate the extent of the problem. In Section 3, I explain my methodology to allow for reproduction of this study or application of my methods to future research. Section 4 is an outline of my results, and in Section 5 I discuss my findings, offer explanations, suggest directions for future research, and warn that ignoring these results and making no changes to the standard practises of the UK press could have serious consequences for individuals and the wider criminal justice system.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Intimate Partner Homicide and the Media**

IPH is not a rare occurrence in the UK, with 80 females and 16 males above the age of 16 being killed in 2018/2019 alone (ONS, 2020). It is widely accepted that this issue is a gendered one, with much of the discussion revolving around violence against women due to femicide being a prevalent problem worldwide. The Femicide Census Report (2020) found

that of all women killed by men between 2009 and 2018 in the UK, 62% were killed by a current or former partner. The UNODC's 2018 'Global Study on Homicide' reported that in cases where victims were killed by an intimate partner, roughly 82% of victims were female and only 18% male.

Although these acts of violence are of equal severity regardless of the sexes involved, the media portrayal of perpetrators and victims can vary massively when the subject is male or female. This is a major issue, as it is understood that the media can have a great effect on the public's perception of incidents and those involved (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). Fairclough (1989) also commented on the cumulative effect of newspaper messages, noting that if the same ideologies are presented repeatedly the public is far more likely to internalise those biases. This makes the patterns repeatedly observed in the media portrayal of different groups even more concerning, as more than two thirds of Britain are consuming news via the internet<sup>2</sup>, which offers access to large quantities of news sources for free. This makes news widely accessible at any time, and easily available to most people instantly, which is understandably concerning when considering Fairclough's observations on ideology internalisation.

Both implicit and explicit biases contribute to the choices made by journalists (see more about implicit association tests and implications in Sections 2.2 & 2.3). Awareness of these biases and the impact seemingly harmless linguistic choices can have on wider societal opinions is vital to ensuring that writers are trained in spotting stereotypes in their work, as this has been shown to reduce implicit bias (Kalra & Boukes, 2020).

Biases and stereotypes can be promoted through both the language of journalists themselves (prose) and also the direct quotations selected to support stories. Not only are writers able to control who they source (with research suggesting that men are quoted more frequently than women (Kalra & Boukes, 2020; Macharia, O'Connor, & Ndangam, 2010)), but also who is quoted in relation to which topic (with research suggesting that women are more often quoted in education and men in business (Kalra & Boukes, 2020; Whitlow, 1977)). This means that not only are female voices given less representation than males, but they are also used to support stereotypes about their sex. Direct comparison of gender stereotypes as they exist in quotations and prose has been neglected, and so I will consider the difference in discussion of kinship and occupational identifiers in both of these areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics (2020)

In the following sections, I will outline the research that surrounds the different aspects of articles I am studying. It is important to note that these areas of the articles may not, and most likely do not, exist in a vacuum. Polarity, for example, may be affected by the perceived prestige of the occupation of perpetrators and victims (Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976). This has not been investigated as part of this study, however Section 2.1.1 does outline stereotypes of sex and gender in an attempt to contextualise and explain findings.

### **2.1.1 Sex, Gender, & Stereotypes**

Only heterosexual, cisgender<sup>3</sup> relationships were used in this investigation, as I wanted to analyse the differences in the portrayal of male and female perpetrators and victims in the UK media. Media biases against the LGBTQ+ community may have had a larger effect on the reporting of those individuals than the sex of victims and perpetrators. The LGBTQ+ community has previously been neglected in research concerning Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), with lesbian, gay, and bisexual couples accounting for only 3% of total research in 2015 (Edwards et al., 2015). Language used to discuss homosexuality in the news has also become more careful, which may lead to biases going unnoticed due to them not being communicated as overtly as they were in the past (Baker, 2005). Baker later also investigated the portrayal of transgender individuals in the press, reporting that they are often presented negatively as ‘victims or villains’ (Baker, 2014; 233). Ignoring LGBTQ+ IPV is equally as damaging, as lack of awareness only contributes to the stigma surrounding problems in the community, discouraging victims from speaking out. This is even more concerning when additional homophobia from the police has been reported when victims have come forward about abuse (Guadalupe-Diaz & Yglesias, 2013; Pattavina et al., 2007).

I suggest, therefore, that this study should be repeated with the emphasis on LGBTQ+ couples in their own right, in order to determine differences in the reporting in regards to sexuality and gender identity, not only sex.

It is important to acknowledge the difference between sex and gender when analysing the results of this study. ‘*Sex*’, in this investigation, is understood as the “categories into which we sort people based on their physical and biological factors such as genitalia and chromosomes”. ‘*Gender*’, however, refers to an individual’s “internal sense of their gender,

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<sup>3</sup> Defined by Bamberger & Farrow (2021;3): “individuals with a gender identity corresponding with that cultural expected based on their sex assigned at birth”

which can include man, woman, another gender, or no gender” (definitions and further information can be found at Bamberger & Farrow, 2021; 3). It should be noted that this definition is circular, however, which can be problematic within itself. For discussion on how definitions must be developed for the benefit of the trans and non-binary community, I recommend Jenkins’ (2018) article.

Stereotypical gender roles are harmful to every group. Not only does the implicit and explicit fostering of these roles restrict cisgender individuals to impossible standards and levels of scrutiny, but they also ‘reinforce’ the idea of ‘otherness’ when it comes to gender non-conforming individuals or those outside of the binary. Traditionally ‘male’ stereotypes are particularly harmful, expecting men to be “heterosexual, powerful, smart, sometimes violent, and strong” (Richy & Burnett, 2020; 50). The British print media has even been found to go as far as to normalise male violence, presenting it as “more rational or instrumental” than the same behaviour in others (Naylor, 2001; 189). This normalisation of male violence is one of the main concerns with what has been coined ‘toxic masculinity’, defined by Kuper (2005; 714) as “the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serveto foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence”.

In contrast, when violent crimes are committed by female perpetrators, the emphasis is often placed on the transgression from the roles often projected onto women, specifically the expectation to be “passive mothers or housewives” (Richy & Burnett, 2020; 50). Female violent crime is more shocking than that committed by males due to these stereotypes, and so the news media present it as so, attempting to explain the actions more so than would be necessary with male perpetrators (Herrington & Nee, 2005; Naylor, 2001).

One of the strategies used (be it consciously or not) is to categorise female perpetrators of crime as ‘mad, bad, or sad’ (Pelvin, 2019; Weare, 2013; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002). These categories present different consequences for female subjects, with some research indicating that women are presented more negatively in newspaper crime reports (those who deny femininity (the ‘bad’ women)), and others arguing that women are treated more leniently. ‘Sad’ and ‘mad’ women cannot be held fully responsible for their actions (Pelvin, 2019), as their crimes stemmed from mental illness or were responses to abuse. Naylor (2001) noted that female violence is “more anxiety producing” than male violence, and so any suggestion that those actions are out of control causes less anxiety than the admittance that women are capable of such crimes.

The chivalry hypothesis suggests that women are treated more favourably when their crimes

are within the boundaries of what is considered ‘feminine’ (Grabe et al., 2016). Petty crimes and crimes committed that still allow for the idyllic image of womanhood are downplayed, whilst violent acts by women are punished even more harshly than their male counterparts (Grabe et al., 2006; Chesney-Lind, 1978). This research highlights a serious implication of gender stereotypes- when biases and stereotypes are so rigid that they affect criminal trial outcomes, anything contributing to the normalisation of those stereotypes is inherently damaging.

## **2.2 Kinship Based Identifiers (KBIs)**

Kinship Based Identifiers (henceforth KBIs) are defined in this study as lexical items denoting relationships between individuals in a kinship unit (Nordquist, 2020). Kinship units can vary between societies (for examples of societal differences see Bonvillain, 2010), and different terms exist within different cultures to refer to familiar relations (see Read, 2015). This study includes both affinal and consanguineous<sup>4</sup> kinship terms existing within British English (see Section 3.2.1 for justification and exceptions).

Newspapers will often use kinships terms when referring to individuals in stories. The Guardian and Observer Style Guide (2021), under the entry ‘father of two, mother of two’, advises that journalists should “only describe people in this way if relevant”. Although this note would imply that there is an equal concern with the use of kinship terms for male and female subjects, research has repeatedly found a discrepancy between the two, with females being subjected to referral by KBI more. Caldas-Coulthard (2004) noted that family and marital relations are often used to refer to women, and Macharia, O’Conner, and Ndangam’s (2010) report found that kinship terms referring to women were four times more common than their male counterparts. This association of women with family seemingly influences the standards they are held to regarding parenthood, too, with men not being portrayed as ‘bad fathers’ in the same way as women are ‘bad mothers’ (Jewkes, 2011).

Research into the presentation of female athletes has also provided similar results, indicating that the same stereotypes prevail despite the positivity of the subject. Kinnick (1998) reported that marriage was seen as an appropriate descriptor for female athletes more so than males. Whereas in instances of crime the discussion of females as mothers, wives and daughters is

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Affinal’ referring to relationships formed through marriage (i.e. ‘wife/husband’) and ‘consanguineous’ referring to relationships shared through blood (i.e. ‘mother/father’) (Bittles, 2018)



used to add to the shock factor of perpetrators and highlight the tragedy of victims, in sport it “detracts from their identities as athletes” (Kinnick, 1998 [216]; Bosmajian, 1995; Foreit et al., 1980). In both scenarios, the use of KBIs in this way imply that female achievements, crimes and even deaths are important due to their connections to others and not worthy of acknowledgement in their own right in the same way as with males.

These stereotypes can lead to biases that journalists may not even be aware of, which can fortunately be studied using Implicit Association Tests (IATs). IATs are conducted in order to determine whether stereotypes and biases are implicit (with the journalist being unaware of them) or explicit (being by conscious choice). Kalra and Boukes (2020) tested Indian journalists and found 61% to demonstrate gender bias, associating female with family and male with career (for more on occupation, see Section 2.3). These findings supported previous research into the area, with biases being found in studies using both IATs (Nosek et al., 2002) and laboratory methods (Wang & Banaji, 1999).

Effect of author sex on biases has also been tested. Nosek et al (2002) observed that men have comparably strong implicit and explicit biases, whereas women demonstrate a stronger implicit bias than men and a weaker explicit bias. These findings are interesting, indicating the importance of subconscious bias, as female authors appear to outwardly support career-driven women whilst maintaining the internalised stereotypes. Banaji and Greenwald (1995) remarked that being part of the community does not prevent the bias, which is clearly supported by these findings.

More education on these biases could be the key to minimising stereotypes in journalism. Kalra and Boukes (2020) found no difference in the biases amongst male and female authors but did remark that fewer were observed when writers were made aware of those biases. I suggest that this awareness should be of key priority to newspapers – as mentioned in Section 2.1, newspapers greatly influence public perception, and reducing the endorsement of gender stereotypes could lead to less societal bias and inequality overall.

**[H1]: Female perpetrators and victims of IPH will be referred to by KBIs more than male perpetrators or victims.**

### **2.3 Occupational Based Identifiers (OBIs)**

Occupational Based Identifiers (henceforth OBIs) are used in this investigation to mean

instances in which subjects are referred to directly by their career (for further definitions and constraints see Section 3.2.2).

In the same way that stereotypical gender roles have led to the association of women with family, the same can be found for men regarding occupation.

Men have been reported as being identified in the media by their occupation more than women, with one study finding an 85% to 58.6% split, respectively (Davis, 1982). It is important to recognise that this study was conducted in the 1980s. Research has suggested that there is a move away from gender stereotypes pertaining to careers, with only 13% of the public agreeing that “a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family” in 2013 compared to 49% in 1984 (Park et al., 2013; 115). Women are occupying careers that were once only worked by men, and this appears to be reflected in this report. The normalisation of women in the workplace is positive for both men and women, with the pressure of financially supporting a family being taken away from the man and more opportunities for financial independence being attainable for women.

That said, sex and gender inequalities are still very much an issue in the workplace. Stereotypes concerning the type of jobs associated with men and women are still supported by occupational statistics in the UK. The number of men holding managerial, directorial or senior official jobs in 2018 was higher than that of women (2260 vs 1226), whereas jobs in more traditionally ‘female’ areas such as caring and leisure were female dominated (2413 vs 546) (ONS, 2018). With these different fields comes different prestige, and so it is not unlikely that higher, managerial positions would be treated with more respect than other occupations. This may manifest in ‘higher’ roles being mentioned more in articles, which, due to them being mostly occupied by men, would potentially mean males being referred to by OBIs more.

The same IAT tests that indicated an association between female and family also repeatedly saw an association between male and career (Kalra & Boukes, 2020; Nosek, 2002; Wang & Banaji, 1999). As discussed in 2.2, awareness of biases proved helpful in the minimisation of these biases in journalistic writing. Therefore, importance should be placed on the training of writers to highlight potentially harmful stereotypes, as the associations of certain careers with different sexes and genders only contributes to the inability for others to access those roles.

In terms of occupation and IPH specifically, increased opportunities for females have led to fewer people staying in abusive relationships (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2013; Whaley, Messner, & Veysey, 2011). Therefore, the rates of IPH with female victims appears to have

fallen in conjunction with the reduction in difference between male-female employment levels (Caman, 2017; Dawson et al., 2009). Implications for this study in regards to this data can be found in Section 5, where I discuss the potential limitations due to the dataset and coding techniques.

**[H2]: Male perpetrators and victims will be referred to by OBIs more than female perpetrators or victims.**

## 2.4 Thematic Roles

Thematic roles can be used by journalists to influence different opinions on events and the people involved. When used in different ways, thematic roles can alter responsibility, depict people in a more negative or positive light, and even be used to confirm and challenge stereotypes. This study focuses on agents (the conscious initiators of events), patients (the undergoer of events, often experiencing a change of state), and experiencers (the observer of events, or undergoer of emotions or sensations in response to events). Therefore, the following literature is focussed on those roles specifically. It is important to note, however, that they are not the only thematic roles that are potentially used to enforce gender stereotypes and biases, and future research should also investigate thematic roles in their entirety to ensure that awareness can be raised on the issue.

Agency is particularly manipulatable. Penelope (1990; 144) commented on the use of agency in English, writing that the language “allows us to suppress reference to the agents who commit specific acts, particularly when the speaker/writer wishes to deny or cover up responsibility”. In the same way as agency can be a tool for portraying subjects in a positive (or at least more neutral) way, it can also be used to vilify others. Van Dijk’s (1988) study highlights one of the main concerns with this, where agency was examined in Dutch newspapers concerning ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities were mainly experiencers or victims in stories and, where they did have agency (in only 7% of headlines), the context in which they had agency was mainly negative. This illustrates how agency can be manipulated to influence public opinions of groups or individuals and can be damaging to communities where negative stereotypes are already an issue.

Thematic roles and their relation to gender stereotypes have been researched across multiple contexts and languages. Perhaps most notably, Macauley and Brice’s (1997) study into the

distribution of gender in syntax textbooks found that men were much more frequently presented as agents than women (56% vs 10%), and women were more likely to be patients than men (48% vs 10%). Pabst et al (2018) recreated this study and found that, once again, men were more often in subject and agentive positions than women. This perceived connection between agency and masculinity has been investigated in other languages, too. An eye-tracking investigation into the influence of gender cues on assigned thematic roles in German revealed a gender bias defined as “the tendency to assign thematic agent roles to masculine/neutral rather than feminine/female nouns” (Esaulova et al., 2017; 1162). Similarly, Richy and Burnett (2020) studied French syntax articles and found that men were more likely to be agents and experiencers than women. This research indicates that gender bias by means of assigned thematic roles is an experience shared across languages. This study only focuses on UK (British English) online news articles, however I believe that this is an issue that should be addressed across languages and cultures. Even if inadvertently, these tendencies may contribute to the normalisation of gender stereotypes, and awareness of this should be raised amongst journalists if practises are to change.

As males are stereotypically the strong aggressor and the female stereotype is to be the nurturing damsel, transgression of these gender roles can lead to victims being portrayed in more negative ways than is warranted. Howard (1984) discussed the ‘normal victim’, noting that the public often looks for reasoning behind crime and there is a tendency to treat the divergence from stereotypical roles as justification for bad things happening. This may manifest in the thematic roles used for victims. Although males are often presented as agents, when they are victims there could be a removal of that agency. I suggest that, through presenting male victims as weak victims (in the use of patient or experiencer positions), the anxiety caused by the idea of female violence could be lessened. This way, it is not the unusually violent, transgressive woman that is at fault, but the unusually submissive, victimised man. This would support the research outlined in Section 2.1.1, where female presentation aims to give reason to shocking actions as to not undermine the stereotypes surrounding femininity.

This would also support the fact that women are often presented in patient or experiencer roles, as this confirms the traditional stereotype of women being the victims of events rather than the perpetrators. The use of this contrast between agentive males and passive females has also been found in studies surrounding sport, with Duncan et al (1990) finding that, on

television, males are presented as being in control of their sports and females merely reacting to them.

**[H3]: Male perpetrators will be presented in an agent role more than female perpetrators, whereas female perpetrators will more often be presented as experiencers and patients. Male victims will be presented in experiencer and patient roles at an equal level as female victims.<sup>5</sup>**

## 2.5 Subjectivity and Polarity

Ideally, newspaper articles would be entirely objective, with journalists reporting the facts of cases and not being influenced by personal opinions or internal biases. However, as indicated in the results of IAT tests outlined in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, this is evidently not the case.

‘Newsworthiness’, understood in this study as the degree to which stories are perceived as worth reporting on, is acknowledged to be inherently subjective (Lundman, 2003; Hunt, 1999). There are no set rules for what constitutes a story as ‘newsworthy’, and yet stories are still included and excluded from newspapers regularly based on invisible and unspoken standards. O’Connell’s (2002) study of 156 stories concerning murder cases indicated that cases in which the perpetrator was female and the victim male were less newsworthy, and that cases with an invulnerable perpetrator and vulnerable victim were the most newsworthy (Black, 2015). However, other scholars have argued that female perpetrators are more newsworthy (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997), due to the importance of shock value when selecting cases (Pelvin, 2019; Peelo et al., 2004).

The norms of what is considered objective have been challenged. It has been highlighted that standards of objectivity predominantly stem from a white, male point of view. This means that feminist, female writers have often been distrusted in the journalistic community due to the belief they may project their ideologies onto their writing (Geertsema-Sligh, 2019). This study does not investigate the subjectivity of articles in relation to the sex of the writer,

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<sup>5</sup> Statistically, as men are more often the perpetrators of murder (and, more specifically, murder women more than the reverse), it is not unreasonable to assume that men will simply be in agent positions more than women. However, as I have balanced the number of male and female perpetrators for this study, I am confident that I have minimised this bias as far as possible within the scope of this investigation. This is something to be considered when interpreting the results and wider implications, however.

however it should be questioned whether all involvement of the female experience in writing should be shunned as a failure to be objective, or if it is merely a field that has been built without understanding the female perspective.

**[H4]: Articles concerning female perpetrators will report higher subjectively than those concerning male perpetrators.**

Polarity refers to how negative or positive an article is overall. Though there is a lack of research into this regarding male and female perpetrators of IPH, predictions can be made based on other factors.

As I discussed in Section 2.1.1, different approaches to female characterisation can convey different images to readers. The chivalry hypothesis would indicate that articles about female perpetrated IPH would be more negative, given the discussion of violent crimes being punished more harshly due to the transgression of females from the traditional role (Grabe et al., 2006; Chesney-Lind, 1999). The assumption, then, would be that female perpetrators in this study would report a lower polarity score than males, due to the harsher standards they are subjected to.

**[H5]: Articles concerning female perpetrators will report an overall lower polarity than those concerning male perpetrators.**

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Article Selection

A total of one hundred articles from online British news sites covering twenty different cases of IPH (ten male-perpetrated, ten female) were identified for this study. Word counts for articles totalled 30,350 for male-perpetrated cases and 25,776 words concerning female perpetrators. This imbalance was accounted for at the data analysis stage (see Section 4.1).

Cases were initially found through a generic internet search for cases in which UK individuals had been killed by their (opposite sex) intimate partner (see Section 2.1.1 for justification of exclusions). Only online news sources were used for this study, though some publications also offer a print version. This format was selected due to the accessibility of articles, making them easier to analyse. Articles also reach a wider audience when online, meaning the potential consequences of the findings for this investigation may be more severe, considering the effect of news on public perception (see Section 2.1).

‘Google News’ was used to find articles, searching for the name of the perpetrator followed by the keyword ‘murder’. This allowed for more accurate results in the search, as it minimised the number of articles in which the same name occurred in an unrelated story. Several criteria were used to judge cases in order to establish relevance. The number of articles related to cases were first checked in order to ensure I would be able to attain five articles for each, knowing this would give me a dataset of a suitable size. Cases where all (or most) articles were concerning the release of the perpetrator were avoided in order to maximise the amount of data relating to initial crimes.

Where possible, the first five articles that resulted from searches were selected for the final dataset, providing those articles originated from different news sources. This was important in ensuring that articles would be representative of the British press. In total, 42 different news sources were featured in the dataset, consisting of both local and national publications.

Other cases required more careful selection of articles. In the Ian Stewart case, for example, I was primarily concerned with the conviction for the murder of his fiancé, Helen Bailey. More recently, however, an investigation has been launched into the potential murder of his first wife, and so a large percentage of articles produced from the search were detailing that case. Similarly, in cases where there were multiple killers (such as the Clare Nicholls case), care was taken to ensure that Nicholls was the primary subject of the articles found and not the other perpetrators, as to be comparable against other female perpetrators of IPH.

Cases in which the conviction was for a charge other than murder (but was still a sentence of time in a prison or secure hospital for the death of an intimate partner) were left in the case pool. An interesting direction for future research may be to study in more depth the way in which the media discusses murder and manslaughter cases, but due to the scope of this study no distinction was made.

## **3.2 Method for Analysis**

Articles were converted into a plain text format detailing the perpetrators' name and sex, the sex of the author, the title of the article and the full article itself. The Python Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) and the tokenize function were used to organise each sentence into their own rows ready for close analysis. The fully coded dataset can be accessed at: <https://cutt.ly/DissertationData2021>.

As this study is more exploratory and not driven by the attempt to prove or disprove any null hypotheses, I elected to use more descriptive statistics instead of null-hypothesis statistical tests (such as chi-square testing).

The following sections outline the specific methods used to approach each section of interest to this investigation.

### **3.2.1 Kinship Based Identifiers**

Kinship Based Identifiers (KBIs) were manually coded for in the dataset. This was achieved by analysing the articles on a sentence level for lexical items connoting relationships for both the perpetrators and victims of each case. Each individual token was counted, giving a more accurate representation of the frequency of KBIs used in each case. As discussed in Section 2.2, both affinal and consanguineous kinship terms were included as to ensure that all instances could be considered. A comprehensive list of all tokens included can be found in the appendices (Table A). Tokens such as 'boyfriend/girlfriend', 'lover' and 'partner' were kept in the token set for data analysis on the grounds that this investigation is interested in intimate relations specifically, and I understand these KBIs to be referring to the same form of relationship. Where the token 'parents' appeared in reference to both the perpetrator and the victim, one token was assigned to each. In the singular form, one token was assigned to the individual referred to in the context. I also included 'pregnant', as the word is inherently tied to a motherly relationship. More constraints were placed on this token, however, and only cases where this was used as an identifier (henceforth referring to tokens in which



‘pregnant’ is used as an attributive adjective establishing the identity of the individual) were included. See below for examples from the data (where ‘\*’ indicates excluded contexts).

- (1) he did not murder his **pregnant** wife
- (2) she was **pregnant** with the couple’s fourth child \*

Similarly, in instances such as the Helena Karine Atay articles, ‘mum-of-the-year’ is only included as a token when used as a noun to identify the perpetrator.

- (1) A ‘**Mum of the Year**’ who stabbed her husband to death
- (2) A one-time ‘**mum of the year**’ champion who was commended \*

I chose to include tokens existing within direct quotes, as journalists make conscious decisions about the quotations they choose to include in the same way as they select the language used in their prose. I coded for KBIs from direct quotations and those from prose separately, however, in order to be able to analyse any differences that may occur.

A small number of cases in the dataset involved multiple perpetrators or victims. In these instances, KBIs referring to other individuals were coded for separately in order to be able to analyse only those in the relationship. The decision was made to exclude analysis of those extra tokens due to all extra perpetrators and victims being males. Further research could investigate the differences between the main perpetrators of crimes focussed on in articles and other accomplices regarding their sex, however given the data set and the scope of this investigation this was not conducted.

Similarly, any KBI tokens referring to partners that perpetrators or victims had prior or after the crime were omitted as to avoid confusion and inaccuracy in results.

### 3.2.2 Occupational Based Identifiers

Occupational Based Identifiers (OBIs) were coded for in a similar manner, with 0 being assigned to sentences without tokens and 1 for every token observed. OBIs, in this investigation, refer to instances in which the occupation of the perpetrator or victim is used to identify them in a sentence. This was determined in a similar way to which ‘pregnant’ was

considered a KBI, with all references to occupation not directly referring to the person in question being omitted (example from data below).

- (1) A former **soldier** has been jailed for
- (2) who **served in the armed forces** \*

This ensured that all tokens analysed were used to identify perpetrators *by* their occupation, rather than making passing reference to establish the background of individuals. In future research, all discussion of occupation could be analysed in order to study occupation as a whole.

Similarly, I did not investigate the breakdown of specific careers as part of this study. As mentioned in 2.3, different careers experience different levels of prestige, and many careers have associations with being traditionally ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. As this study is concerned with quantitative data, this information falls out of the scope of what was interesting to my investigation. I discuss the potential advantages to including more specific career information in Section 5.

### 3.2.3 Thematic Roles

A total of six cases were selected at random for thematic role analysis, ensuring that the smaller sample consisted of three male and three female-perpetrated cases. This meant that the data remained representative of the larger dataset whilst being manageable considering the scope of the investigation. Differences of word counts in male and female-perpetrated articles have been accounted for in analysis, which can be found in Section 4.4.

As discussed in Section 2.4, three thematic roles were selected for the analysis stage, based on those expected to be most prevalent in the data. See below for examples of each role from the data, where the individual fulfilling the role and the action are in bold.

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| (1) <b>Agent</b>       | <b>Cichy spoke</b> only to confirm his personal details.                                 |
| (2) <b>Patient</b>     | accused of <b>killing</b> his first wife <b>Debbie</b> and disposing of her body in 1999 |
| (3) <b>Experiencer</b> | <b>he</b> [Griggs]... <b>became worried</b> and phoned police to report her missing      |

As with other categories, these roles were coded for manually, with 0 or 1 being assigned to each victim and perpetrator depending on the role they occupy in each sentence.

### **3.2.4 Polarity and Subjectivity**

After the data was organised by sentence, another Python module, `pattern.en`, was used for sentiment analysis, calculating the subjectivity and polarity score for each sentence.

The polarity score indicates the overall positivity of the sentence based on analysing for commonly occurring positive and negative adjectives, and the score produced falls somewhere between -1 (negative) and 1 (positive).

The subjectivity score is calculated by analysing for factual and opinion-based information in a sentence. A score between 0 and 1 is returned, with a score closer to 0 meaning the text is objective and a score closer to 1 indicating a high level of subjectivity.

## **4 DATA**

### **4.1 General Breakdown**

In this section, I outline the quantitative results of my investigation including the tables and graphs illustrating the findings. I organise these results by each topic I have studied, allowing for closer observation of raw numbers and percentages.

Although the dataset consisted of an equal number of cases and articles concerning both sexes (10 cases and 50 articles for both male and female perpetrators), the overall data size was larger for male perpetrators. In total, articles discussing male perpetrated IPH equalled 30,350 words, compared to the 25,776 words for female articles. This indicates that, though making up 50% of the data on a surface level, the actual distribution of the dataset is 45.9%

female perpetrated articles and 54.1% male perpetrated, accounting for article length. When calculated, this gave an average of 21.3 words per sentence (WPS) in male perpetrator articles compared to 19.8 in those concerning females.

<b>Data Size</b>			
	<b>Total Words</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>WPS</b>
<b>Female</b>	25 776	45.9%	19.8
<b>Male</b>	30 350	54.1%	21.3

**Table 1** Breakdown of data distribution across articles covering male and female perpetrated IPH, covering total words relating to each sex, percentage of the dataset attributed to each, and average number of words per sentence (wps = total words/number of rows (where each row represents one sentence of an article)).

As author sex is also being acknowledged as a potential contributing factor to the use of KBIs and OBIs in reporting, information regarding the word counts and percentages of the dataset written by male, female, mixed sex, and unknown authors can be found in Table 2. Mixed sex authors refers to articles written by multiple authors where at least one is male and one is female, and unknown authors refers to articles where the author was not credited on the source.

### **Data Size By Author Sex**

---

	<b>Total Words</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Female</b>	17307	30.8
<b>Male</b>	24243	43.2
<b>Mixed</b>	5366	9.6
<b>Unknown</b>	9210	16.4

**Table 2** Breakdown of data written by authors of different sexes, including male, female, mixed sex and unknown authors, including overall word count and percentage of total articles written.

Male authors account for the largest percentage of the dataset, contributing 43.2%. Female authors contribute less, with 30.8%. Mixed and unknown authors account for 9.6% and 16.4%, respectively. I discuss the potential effects of remaining anonymous as an author and collaboration of sexes in Section 5.

Data size is different for thematic role analysis due to the decision to code for a smaller sample size of articles, details of which can be found in Section 4.4.

## **4.2 Kinship Based Identifiers**

Table 3 shows the distribution of KBIs referring to male and female perpetrators across article prose and direct quotations. Percentages have been included for comparison to those occupied by both sexes in the wider dataset in Section 4.1. Number of tokens per 10,000 words has also been indicated, in order to account for the difference in sample sizes.

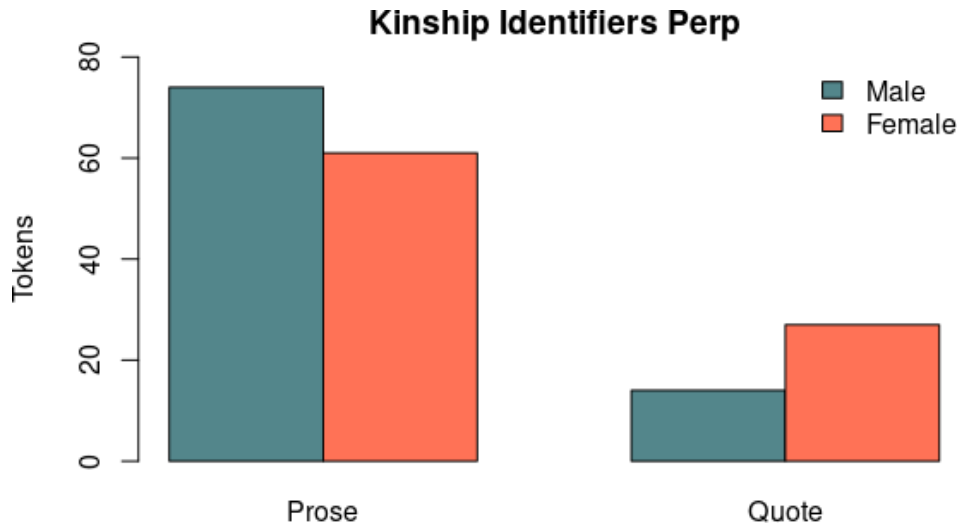
As seen in the table, an equal number of KBIs (88) were used to refer to male and female perpetrators in the article. This has been normalised to be roughly 29/10,000 words being KBIs referring to male perpetrators compared to 34.1/10,000 for females. Therefore, female perpetrators are referred to using kinship based identifiers more frequently than their male counterparts.

KBIs observed in article prose for both male and female perpetrators are roughly reflective of the percentages they occupy in the overall dataset, for example female perpetrators account for 45.9% of the dataset and 45.2% of KBIs used. However, direct quotes in articles are much more likely to include representation of female perpetrators regarding their relationships than male perpetrators (65.9% vs 34.1%, respectively).

<b>Kinship Based Identifiers (Perp)</b>					
	<b>Prose</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total Tokens</b>
<b>Female</b>	61	45.2	27	65.9	88
<b>Male</b>	74	54.8	14	34.1	88
<b>Total</b>	135		41		176

**Table 3** Distribution of Kinship Based Identifiers (KBIs) referring to male and female perpetrators, covering total tokens observed in article prose, tokens existing in direct quotes, and the percentages of each in regards to each sex.

Figure 1 illustrates the raw token numbers of KBIs for male and female perpetrators, organised by those existing in article prose and those found in direct quotations. Far more KBIs exist within prose, which understandably makes up the majority of the article.



**Figure 1** Bar chart outlining the total number of KBI tokens for male and female perpetrators, organised by those in article prose and direct quotation.

There are also differences in the way that KBIs are used to refer to male and female victims. As seen in Table 4, KBIs are more common in the discussion of victims than perpetrators for both sexes. Female victims are far more likely to be referred to by their relationships than males, with a normalised frequency of 105.1/10,000 words being KBIs, compared to 59.3/10,000 for males. Table 3 indicates that female victims are more likely to be referred to by KBIs in both prose and quotation, though the dissimilarity between the sexes is more apparent in the prose of articles, where 62.4% of KBIs used are in reference to female victims.

<b>Kinship Based Identifiers (Victim)</b>					
	<b>Prose</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total Tokens</b>
<b>Female</b>	212	62.4	59	53.2	271
<b>Male</b>	128	37.6	52	46.8	180
<b>Total</b>	340		111		451

**Table 4** Distribution of Kinship Based Identifiers (KBIs) referring to male and female victims, covering total tokens observed in article prose, tokens existing in direct quotes, and the percentages of each in regards to each sex.



**Figure 2** Bar chart outlining the total number of KBI tokens for male and female victims, organised by those in article prose and direct quotation.

Table 5 and Figure 3 illustrate the differences in frequencies of KBIs used across the different sexes of authors in the dataset. Male and female authors use KBIs most frequently, particularly when discussing perpetrators of the opposite sex to themselves.



**Kinship Identifiers by Author Sex (Perp)**

---

	<i>perp sex</i>	<b>n Tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<i>n/10,000 words</i>
<b>Male</b>	<b>M</b>	23	41.8	9.5
	<b>F</b>	32	58.2	13.2
<b>Female</b>	<b>M</b>	50	64.9	28.9
	<b>F</b>	27	35.1	15.6
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>M</b>	3	17.6	5.6
	<b>F</b>	14	82.4	26.1
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>M</b>	12	44.4	13
	<b>F</b>	15	55.6	16.3

**Table 5** Distribution of KBIs referring to male and female perpetrators by author sex, detailing total number of tokens per author sex per perpetrator, the percentages for each, and the number of tokens per 10,000.

Female authors use approximately 29 KBIs relating to male perpetrators per 10,000 words- the highest frequency of any in the group. However, other groups analysed use more KBIs for females than males, most notably of all being the mixed sex group, with 26.1/10,000 compared to 5.6/10,000 for males.



**Figure 3** Graph illustrating the number of KBIs per 10,000 words used by male, female, mixed and unknown authors in regards to male and female perpetrators of IPH.

Table 6 and Figure 4 show the effect of author sex on frequencies of KBIs referring to male and female victims of IPH. As seen in the table, female victims are referred to using KBIs more frequently than male victims by all authors except the mixed author group, who use KBIs for males 50.3/10,000 words compared to 29.8 for females.

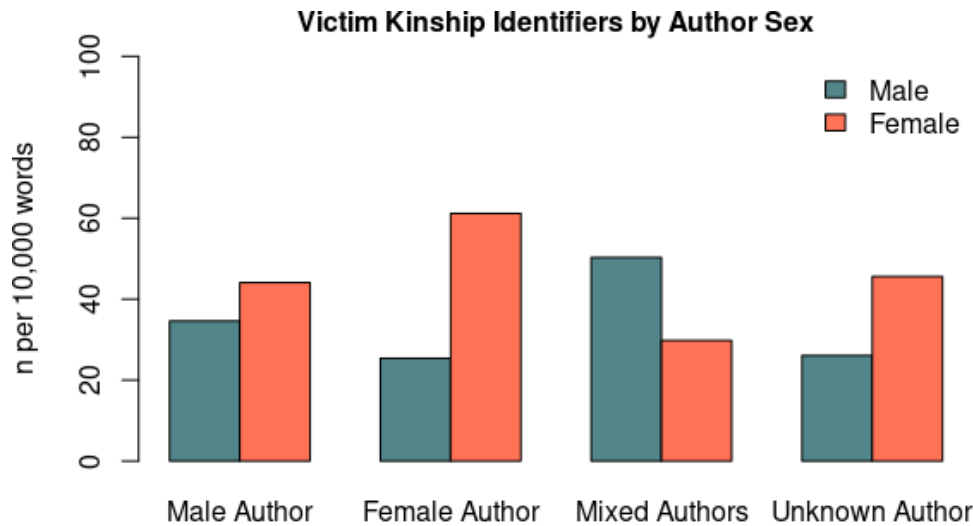
**Kinship Identifiers by Author Sex (Victim)**

---

	<i>victim sex</i>	<b>n Tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<i>n/10,000 words</i>
<b>Male</b>	<b>M</b>	84	44.0	34.6
	<b>F</b>	107	56.0	44.1
<b>Female</b>	<b>M</b>	45	29.8	25.4
	<b>F</b>	106	70.2	61.2
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>M</b>	27	62.8	50.3
	<b>F</b>	16	37.2	29.8
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>M</b>	24	36.4	26.1
	<b>F</b>	42	63.6	45.6

**Table 6** Distribution of KBIs referring to male and female perpetrators by author sex, detailing total number of tokens per author sex per victim, the percentages for each, and the number of tokens per 10,000 words.

Articles written by female authors referred to female victims by OBIs more frequently than any other group, with 61.2 of every 10,000 words being a female-referencing OBI.



**Figure 4** Graph illustrating the number of KBIs per 10,000 words used by male, female, mixed and unknown authors in regards to male and female victims of IPH.

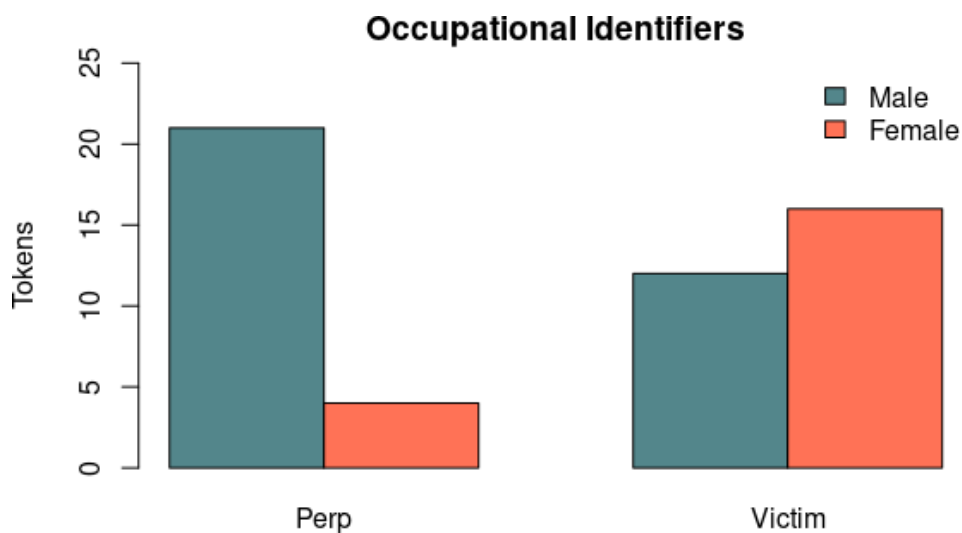
### 4.3 Occupational Based Identifiers

Table 7 shows the breakdown of OBIs used for male and female perpetrators and victims. OBIs were used more frequently in relation to victims than perpetrators, with 28 and 25 tokens, respectively. OBIs were used to refer to male perpetrators and victims more than female perpetrators and victims. As illustrated in figure 5, male perpetrators are far more likely to be discussed using their occupation than female perpetrators (84% vs 16%). Although the data could be first interpreted as showing female victims to be referred to by OBI more frequently than male counterparts, on closer inspection one individual female victim accounts for 50% of those tokens. This victim was a well-known children’s author, and so it is not unusual for her occupation to be heavily featured in articles. More about the implication of this is discussed in Section 5.

### Occupational Based Identifiers

	Perpetrator		Victim		Total
	n tokens	%	n tokens	%	
<b>Female</b>	4	16	16	57.1	20
<b>Male</b>	21	84	12	42.9	33
<b>Total</b>	25		28		

**Table 7** Distribution of Occupational Based Identifiers (OBIs) referring to male and female perpetrators and victims, covering total tokens and the percentages of each in regards to each sex.



**Figure 5** Graph showing the total number of tokens of Occupational Based Identifiers (OBIs) used for male and female perpetrators and victims.

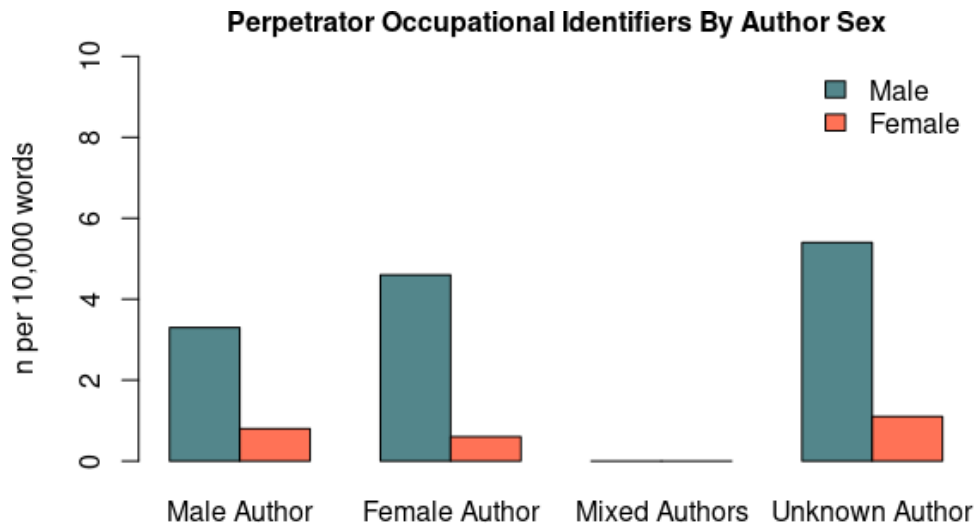
As with kinship based identifiers, the sex of authors were studied in regards to OBI use.

Table 8 and Figure 6 show that males are referred to by OBIs more frequently than females when both perpetrators and victims of IPH. Articles with mixed-sex authors featured no OBIs describing either male or female perpetrators. Unknown authors, however, used OBIs the

most frequently of the group to refer to male perpetrators, working out to approximately 5.4/10,000 words referring to male perpetrators by occupation.

<b>Occupational Identifiers by Author Sex (Perp)</b>				
	<i>perp sex</i>	<b>n Tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<i>n/10,000 words</i>
<b>Male</b>	<b>M</b>	8	80.0	3.3
	<b>F</b>	2	20.0	0.8
<b>Female</b>	<b>M</b>	8	88.9	4.6
	<b>F</b>	1	11.1	0.6
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>M</b>	0	0.0	0
	<b>F</b>	0	0.0	0
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>M</b>	5	83.3	5.4
	<b>F</b>	1	16.7	1.1

**Table 8** Distribution of OBIs referring to male and female perpetrators by author sex, detailing total number of tokens per author sex per perpetrator, the percentages for each, and the number of tokens per 10,000 words.



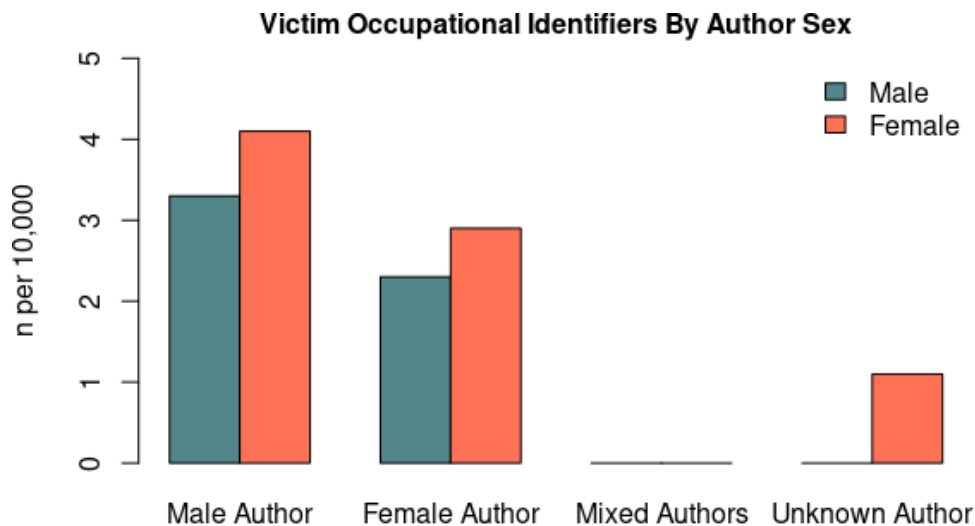
**Figure 6** Graph illustrating the number of OBIs per 10,000 words used by male, female, mixed and unknown authors in regards to male and female perpetrators of IPH.

Female victims are referred to by occupation more than male victims by male, female, and unknown authors, as seen in Table 9.

<b>Occupational Identifiers by Author Sex (Victim)</b>				
	<i>victim sex</i>	<b>n Tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<i>n/10,000 words</i>
<b>Male</b>	<b>M</b>	8	44.4	3.3
	<b>F</b>	10	55.6	4.1
<b>Female</b>	<b>M</b>	4	44.4	2.3
	<b>F</b>	5	55.6	2.9
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>M</b>	0	0.0	0
	<b>F</b>	0	0.0	0
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>M</b>	0	0.0	0
	<b>F</b>	1	100.0	1.1

**Table 9** Distribution of OBIs referring to male and female victims by author sex, detailing total number of tokens per author sex per victim, the percentages for each, and the number of tokens per 10,000 words.

As was observed in the data concerning perpetrators, articles written by a mix of male and female authors featured no OBIs. Unknown authors only used one OBI across all articles, relating to female victims.



**Figure 7** Graph illustrating the number of OBIs per 10,000 words used by male, female, mixed and unknown authors in regards to male and female victims of IPH.

#### 4.4 Thematic Roles

As a smaller sample of three cases relating to each perpetrator sex were selected for thematic role analysis, the distribution of words accounting for male and female perpetrators is slightly different (see Table 10). This has been considered during analysis, however the word count for the thematic role sample is not so unrepresentative of the wider dataset that findings cannot be applied to other articles. For example, female perpetrators account for 42.3% of the thematic analysis sample and 45.9% of the overall article word count.



### Data Size Thematic Role Sample

	Total Words	%
<b>Female</b>	7231	42.3
<b>Male</b>	9853	57.7

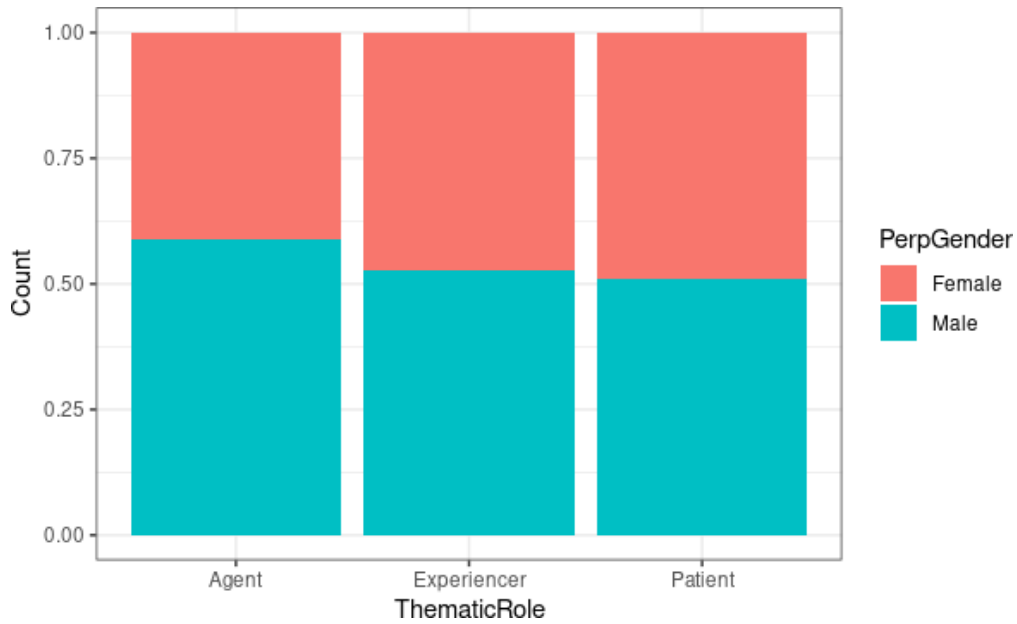
**Table 10** Breakdown of data distribution across articles used for analysis of thematic roles, covering the data word count of articles dedicated to both sexes and the percentages of each.

Table 11 indicates that male perpetrators are represented as agents more frequently than female perpetrators of IPH (59% vs 41%). Patient and experiencer roles are also more frequent for male perpetrators, with male perpetrators occupying 51.1% and 52.7% of all examples, respectively. This is discussed more in Section 5.

<b>Thematic Roles (Perp)</b>						
	<b>Agent</b>		<b>Patient</b>		<b>Experiencer</b>	
	<b>n tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n tokens</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Female</b>	134	41.0	44	48.9	35	47.3
<b>Male</b>	193	59.0	46	51.1	39	52.7
<b>Total</b>	327		90		74	

**Table 11** Distribution of Thematic Roles played by male and female perpetrators, covering the number of times each theme appeared and the percentages of those times belonging to both sexes.

These findings are more clear in figure 8.



**Figure 8** Graph showing the distribution of thematic roles (agent, experiencer, and patient) across male and female perpetrators of IPH. The Y-axis shows the proportion of each thematic role occupied by male and female victims, where 0.5 would suggest an equal split.

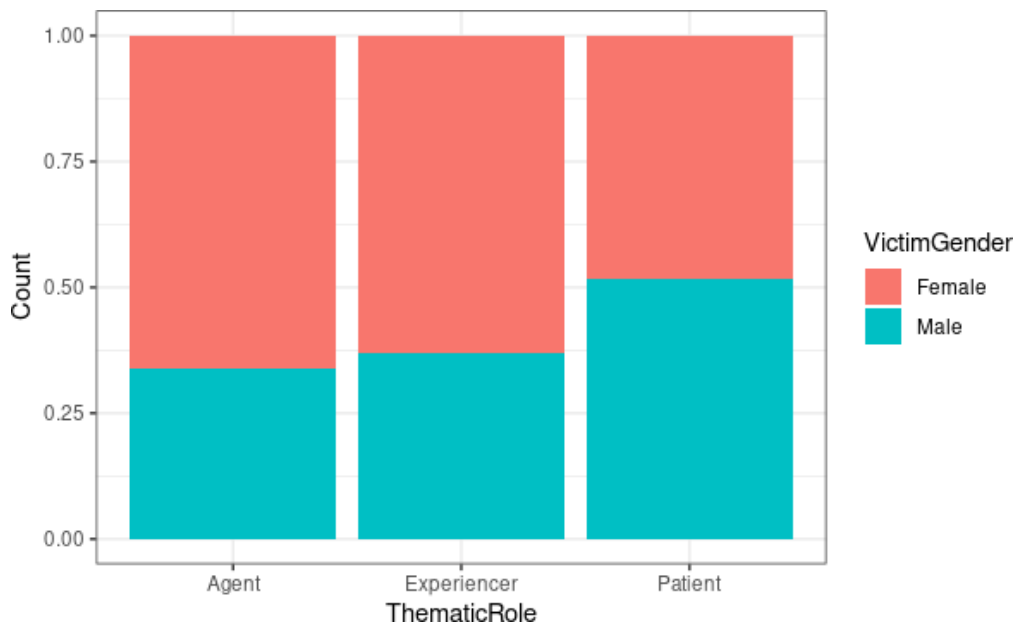
Table 12 demonstrates a stark difference in the thematic roles assigned to victims in the dataset. Female victims are far more likely to be presented in agent and experiencer roles than men, representing 66.1% and 62%, respectively. Though male and female victims appear to be represented in patient roles at a more equal rate, female victims are still presented as patients a disproportionate amount of the time when considering the difference in the sample distribution.

**Thematic Roles (Victim)**

	<b>Agent</b>		<b>Patient</b>		<b>Experiencer</b>	
	<b>n tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n tokens</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n tokens</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Female</b>	72	66.1	48	48.5	114	63.0
<b>Male</b>	37	33.9	51	51.5	67	37.0
<b>Total</b>	109		99		181	

**Table 12** Distribution of thematic roles played by male and female victims, covering the number of times each theme appeared and the percentages of those times belonging to both sexes.

Figure 9 illustrates these findings, emphasising the disparity between male and female victim representation, particularly regarding agent and experiencer roles.



**Figure 9** Graph showing the distribution of thematic roles (agent, experiencer, and patient) across male and female victims of IPH. The Y-axis shows the proportion of each thematic role occupied by male and female victims, where 0.5 would suggest an equal split.

## 4.5 Polarity and Subjectivity

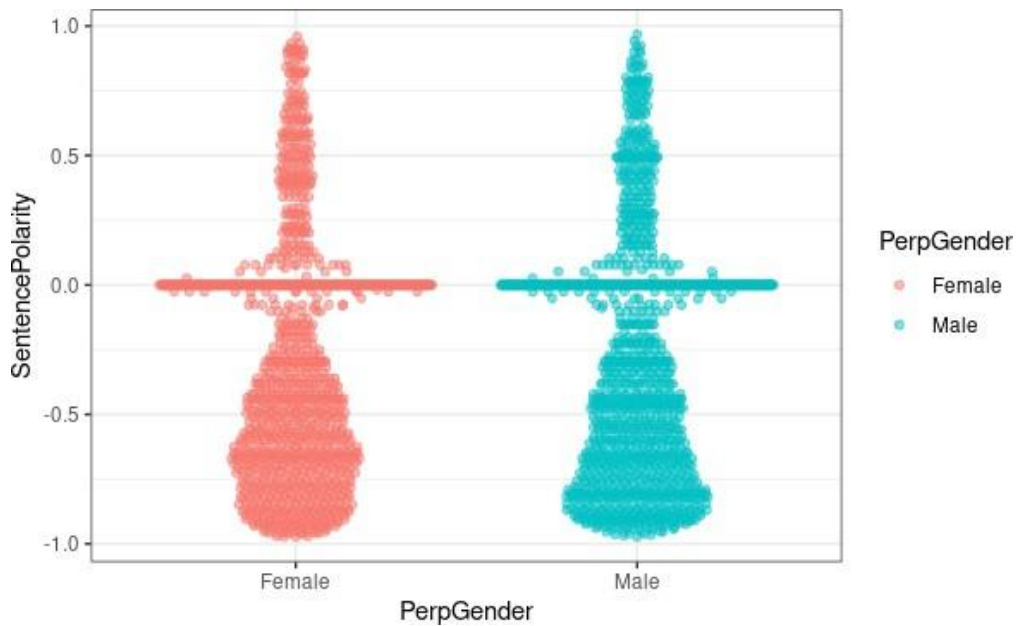
Sentence polarity and subjectivity were plotted using beeswarm charts in order to illustrate the distributions more clearly.

The average polarity overall was -0.2709 for articles concerning female perpetrators and -0.2747 for those about males. Therefore, articles about male perpetrators of IPH were, on average, more negative than those about female perpetrators. Polarity scores are incredibly close for both, however, and articles about both sexes are more negative than positive overall.

Figure 10 shows the distribution of polarity scores of each sentence concerning male and female perpetrators of IPH. As seen in the chart, distributions are fairly similar across both sexes, with the large concentration along the 0 line indicating that most sentences are neutral. Otherwise, more sentences fall between 0 and -1, indicating that articles are overall more negative.

Female perpetrator distribution is slightly higher, with more sentences falling into the -0.5 to -0.75 range compared to those concerning male perpetrators, where there is a higher concentration between -0.75 and -1.

This also means that articles about male victims are more positive than those about female victims. This is because articles concerning male perpetrators are also concerning female victims, and so reversal of sexes indicates in the graph will show victim polarity.

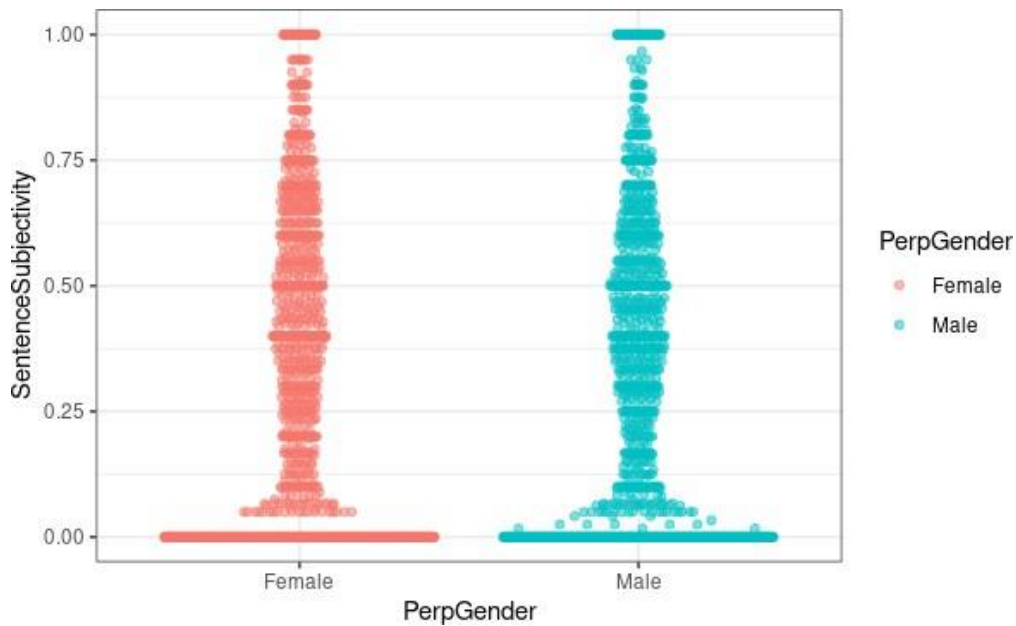


**Figure 10** Beeswarm chart showing the polarity of sentences concerning female (left) and male (right) perpetrators of IPH.

In terms of subjectivity of articles, those concerning male perpetrators returned an average subjectivity score of 0.301 compared to the female average of 0.300. This indicates that male perpetrator articles were slightly more subjective than those with female perpetrators.

Figure 11 illustrates the distribution of sentences based on their subjectivity scores, where 0 indicates that sentences are entirely objective and those with a score of 1 are entirely opinion based. There are a large concentration of sentences at 0 for those concerning both sexes, indicating a large amount of objectivity in the data. There are also several plots at 1, indicating a degree of subjectivity. There appear to be a larger concentration of plots at 1 for male perpetrators, however most plots for both sexes appear to be in the 0.25 to 0.75 range.

As with polarity, this indicates that articles with female victims are more subjective than those with male victims.



**Figure 11** Beeswarm chart showing the subjectivity of sentences concerning female (left) and male (right) perpetrators of IPH.

## 5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The findings outlined in Section 4 indicate several differences in the reporting of male and female perpetrators of IPH in the UK press, confirming a number of my hypotheses.

Female perpetrators are more likely to be referred to by their kinship relationships in direct quotations selected for articles, however the main prose of articles contains roughly equal numbers for both sexes. This indicates that, though the stereotypical association of females with family may not manifest in the language of authors themselves, quotations chosen for articles are still vessels for the facilitation of those ideals, supporting the findings of Kalra Boukes (2020) and Whitlow (1997). This study did not involve analysis of the sexes of individuals quoted in articles, however this may be an interesting direction for future research in order to see if men are quoted more than women and if the topics they are quoted on also contribute to stereotypical views. Female victims are more likely to be referred to by KBIs in

both prose and quotation, though the difference is more striking for those in article prose. These findings support [H1] (that female perpetrators and victims would be referred to by KBIs more often than males), and also reflect Macharia, O’Conner, and Ndangam’s (2010) findings that women are identified by kinship terms disproportionately more than men.

The sex of the author appears to have some significance on the frequency of KBIs used in an article. When discussing perpetrators, male and female writers appear to use KBIs more when the subject is of the opposite sex to themselves. Female authors specifically refer to male perpetrators by kinship terms almost twice as frequently than other females. This could be seen to challenge the suggestion that being part of a group does not influence exhibited biases towards that group (Banaji & Greenwald, 1995), and may suggest that female writers are more conscious about avoiding perpetuating female stereotypes through their language choices. When articles are written by multiple, mixed sex writers, female perpetrators are referred to using KBIs more frequently than males. This could be an interesting direction for future research, as it could suggest that female writers are more likely to converge to the stereotypes exhibited by male writers when collaborating on work. Female victims of IPH were also referred to by kinship more than male victims by authors that are male, female and unknown. Effect of collaboration of different sex writers on the stereotypes exhibited in their writing may be an interesting area of study for future research, as this was the only group using KBIs more for male perpetrators. However, in order to truly test the effects of author sex on the reporting of male and female victims and perpetrators of IPH, I suggest that a larger and more balanced sample be studied, and qualitative investigation of specific contexts be considered. This would allow for better generalisation and more confident results to be drawn from the datasets concerning unknown and mixed sex authors, who accounted for the lowest percentage of articles included in this study.

My investigation of occupational based identifiers also returned interesting results. When discussing perpetrators, OBIs referring to males occurred over five times more frequently than for females, supporting [H2] (that male perpetrators would be referred to more than female perpetrators) and reflecting previous research into the area (e.g. Davis, 1982).

Though findings for victims indicated that OBIs are more prevalent in the discussion of females (disagreeing with H2), closer analysis revealed that one victim - a well-known

children's author – accounted for 50% of the overall token count. It is understandable that her occupation would be at the forefront of any article concerning her death, given that public interest in cases is one of the main concerns when attempting to sell newspapers. I suggest that future research should investigate the careers of perpetrators and victims more closely in order to gain interesting insight into whether frequency of OBI use is affected by perceived social prestige of different occupations. Due to the nature of this investigation, not all careers of male and female perpetrators and victims could be found. This may indicate that not all individuals had occupations to be mentioned, which, as discussed in Section 2.3, has been shown to affect rates of IPH (Caman, 2017; Dawson et al., 2009). Future research into this area should account for the number of employed and unemployed perpetrators and victims in the dataset as to be able to conduct analysis according to the sample sizes.

Author sex also had interesting effects on use of OBIs. Male, female and unknown authors used OBIs more frequently when discussing male perpetrators than females, supporting Banaji & Greenwald's (1995) theory that group membership does not prevent bias. There are a few reasons why KBI and OBI results may have produced different conclusions about Banaji & Greenwald's research, and I suggest that this is due to the sex of writers and perceived positivity of the stereotypes involved. The association of women with family predominantly stems from a lifestyle women had no control over (not being allowed to work and being expected to be the subservient housewife), and so any suggestion of the survival of that ideology is inherently negative. Therefore, it would be understandable that female writers would be more conscious of contributing to that stereotype and choose language carefully as to not imply that women are still held to a higher standard of family duty than men. On the other hand, the association of males with work has never been negative, as men had the control over society to dictate these roles, are celebrated for the work they do and still overwhelmingly occupy the highest roles in society (see Section 2.3 for statistics). Therefore, contribution to the survival of that stereotype is not something consciously avoided by men, as it is not harmful to them. This is something I believe would be interesting to investigate further, perhaps through a study observing the polarity of discussion of different stereotypes in males and females.

This investigation has raised a number of questions surrounding the influence of author sex, and I believe that further research is required in order to fully understand the scope of the impact. Could the anonymity of not being credited for articles spur authors to be less



conscious of the biases they help sustain through their lexical choices? Could the collaboration of mixed-sex authors on articles foster a less-biased writing environment due to the combination of different societal experiences and opinions? Or is mixed-sex author collaboration actually damaging to the movement attempting to minimise these biases in reporting due to the suppression of female voices in the media? These research questions have not yet been studied and could lead to important insight into the impact of author sex and gender identity on biases within the UK press.

Thematic roles were also investigated as part of this study. Male perpetrators were given more agency in articles than their female counterparts, confirming what I predicted in [H3]. Female perpetrators are presented in patient and experiencer roles disproportionately more than male perpetrators. These findings support the results of previous investigations into sex and thematic role (Pabst et al., 2018; Esaulova et al., 2017; Macauley and Brice, 1997).

Findings relating to the thematic roles of victims, however, were not so predictable. Female victims are presented as agents significantly more than male victims, contradicting what I would expect to find based on the research referenced above. However, there may be an explanation for this based on the gender roles discussed in Section 2.1.1. As noted by Richy & Burnett (2020), traditionally male gender roles place the emphasis on strength, and particularly strength in comparison to women. The male victims in this study were all killed by their female intimate partner, which does not adhere to the stereotype of the strong alpha male celebrated by toxic masculinity. Similarly to how female perpetrators of IPH are often depicted as 'mad' or 'sad' in an attempt to make the transgression from societal expectations more palatable for the community (Pelvin, 2019), could taking agency away from male victims be an attempt to lessen the anxiety caused by transgressive females by portraying victims as merely 'weak' men? This would avoid challenging the ideology that women could be stronger and dominant over men, which would satisfy the goal of the press to maintain social order (Little, 2014). Note that this may accumulate in male authors being more likely to make male victims patients more frequently than female authors. Due to the scope of this paper, this was not something I was able to investigate further, however in order to test this theory, this may be worth testing for. This could be an interesting avenue for future research, as awareness of ways in which the news media contributes to the maintenance of toxic masculinity is crucial to the advancements of true equality of the sexes in society.

Articles concerning female perpetrated crimes were, on average, more objective and positive than those concerning male perpetrators, diverging from what I expected to see in [H4] and

[H5]. Although the scores were very similar for perpetrators of both sexes, the distribution of sentences in regard to polarity and subjectivity were interesting.

The beeswarm chart appears to show that a higher frequency of sentences from female perpetrator articles are negative, but that there are a larger quantity of sentences for male perpetrators that are more negative, leading to them having a slightly lower polarity score overall. Future research may want to study the polarity of articles about male and female perpetrators across a variety of different crime categories and victim sexes. It is difficult (due to the methodology employed for this investigation) to confidently say that articles concerning male perpetrators were more negative because of the male perpetrator, and not related to the victim being female, or due to the nature of the crime. Similarly, as discussed in relation to thematic roles, the slightly higher polarity score of female articles may not be related to the perpetrator, but another technique employed to downplay the transgression and reduce the anxiety caused by female violence. However, I have been able to provide an important base for following research, as information regarding this topic is lacking in the field.

Subjectivity is more difficult to analyse in terms of differences in distribution, as male perpetrated articles were only 0.001% more subjective than those regarding females. Author sex was not analysed in relation to subjectivity or polarity, and this may be an area where there are large differences. As discussed in Section 2.5, female writers are often considered more subjective in their writing due to the concept of objectivity in journalism being based on a white, male point of view (Geertsema-Sligh, 2019). Investigation into the way that female journalists alter writing style as to avoid scrutiny and criticism for being 'too subjective' may unearth reasoning behind the unexpected results of this study and many others – perhaps females wrote a larger percentage of female perpetrated articles and had to consciously account for their 'biases'. These are all important things that should be accounted for in the analysis of journalistic choices, as language is almost always shaped by individual experience, and, as indicated throughout this study, male and female experiences are not equivalent (yet).

In conclusion, there is a difference in the way that UK online newspapers report on male and female perpetrators (and victims) of Intimate Partner Homicide, some of which are predictable based on past research and some of which will need to be investigated further. I suggest that this is an incredibly important and critically under-researched area of linguistic study, as it is well understood that newspapers play a large part in shaping public opinion.

Until journalists (and the media as a whole) are made aware of the biases they hold (whether implicit or explicit), I believe there will always be a barrier to reaching true equality of the sexes. The scope of this investigation did not allow for extension to the portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community, gender identity over sex, the impact of race, or analysis of newspapers in other areas of the world. It is no question that these considerations are of equal importance, and I suggest that the emphasis should be on developing the literature surrounding them in order for the same treatment in investigations such as this. I am optimistic about the ever-growing interest in this aspect of linguistics, and anticipate the potential benefits increased awareness and future research could bring.

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## APPENDICES

**Table A** Kinship Based Identifiers observed in the dataset, organised by whether they are gender specific (male or female) or are gender neutral (GN)/plural (P). Asterisks indicate tokens included despite not being affinal or consanguineous (justification in Section 3.2.1).

<b>Kinship Based Identifiers</b>		
<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>GN/P</b>
Mother	Father	Parent/s
Mum	Dad	Fiancé/e
Sister	Brother	Widow
Daughter	Son	Lover*
Gran	Boyfriend*	Partner*
Girlfriend*		
Pregnant		

