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Lies in the Headlines: How Media Coverage Painted the Police Violence against Philando Castile and George Floyd

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Lies in the Headlines: How Media Coverage Painted the Police Violence against Philando
Castile and George Floyd

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis under the direction of

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Abstract

Three words: “I can’t breathe.” These words changed the political and social landscape of America. Police violence against Black Americans is not a new phenomenon. Generations after generations have experienced pain and anxiety as Black lives are being taken by the individuals who are supposed to protect them. However, what is a new phenomenon is the power and role of the media in these cases. The word choices and descriptions of victims in news articles completely shape and influence public opinion. This study examines how the media presented the cases of police brutality in two specific instances: the case of Philando Castile and the case of George Floyd. In addition, this study will evaluate how the media perpetuated perpetrator stereotypes of Black men despite them being the victims of violence. In July 2016, Philando Castile was brutally shot five times at a traffic stop. Not even five years later, only 10 miles away, George Floyd was suffocated in the streets. The city of Minneapolis experienced death after death, heartbreak after heartbreak, and thousands of people across the nation mourned the lives lost. Prior research shows that Black men are painted as deviant, unruly, and criminalistic in the media. However, few studies go a step beyond to analyze how Black men are described when victims of racially motivated police violence. A content examination of media articles from the *Star Tribune*, *Kare11*, and *New York Times* was conducted. Social heuristics, media framing, and socialization were used as guiding academic frameworks. The results display the biases that are present in current media and showcase how stereotypes influence public attitudes toward Black men.

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List of Abbreviations

RD = racial discrimination

PA = police accountability

NDC = no definitive conclusion

Introduction

Throughout history, marginalized groups in American society were controlled and suppressed by incarceration. Slaveholders and white supremacists viewed Native Americans, immigrants, Black Americans, and other minorities as obstacles to sustaining white superiority. In fact, the prison system that is present in America today was created by people in power as a backlash to Black Reconstruction and used as a tool to re-enslave newly freed slaves (Browne 2010). Our current prison system started as a patrol system. Southern states such as North Carolina began to implement “passing cards” and complex slave codes to restrict slaves (Hadden 2001). Eventually, individuals were hired and paid to affirm that these restrictions were being upheld. Their job was to detain anyone who violated those restrictions. Thus, for the first time in American history, we witnessed a career made solely by patrolling and capturing slaves. The relationship between slave patrols and the criminal justice system is crucial to understand. The slave patrol system had a domino effect, and it only became more and more systematic and rigid. As time progressed and as traditional slavery was eradicated, negative attitudes towards slaves and people of color were reflected in American laws, policies, and in turn, the entire criminal justice system.

Legislators passed Black Codes to imprison Black Americans for things that would otherwise be legal. For example, Black Codes made acts such as loitering and “breaking curfew” criminal (Browne 2010). Their goal was to lock up as many Black Americans as possible to gain free labor and uphold the cultural dynamics and economic value that once came with slavery. Thus, the era of mass criminalization and incarceration began. With this increase in the criminalization of Black people, many Americans tended to have a negative portrayal of people of color. Research finds that in American society, Black people are highly associated with

violence and aggression (Duncan 1976). In addition, Black figures are also seen as more threatening than white figures even when they are performing the same acts (Duncan 1976). This dynamic is the key to understanding why Black people are more likely to be harassed and detained by the police. Their figures and presence are seen as more threatening than their white counterparts and this internal bias causes law enforcement to scrutinize and monitor Black bodies heavily.

The aggressive perception of Black people, most notably Black men, has only been expanded further by our digital world. The media is a powerful tool that news outlets can use to frame stories to push a specific perspective or agenda. Research has indicated that many journalists make race the most prominent issue when reporting on any race-related incident (Entman 1992). This racial framing puts race at the center and not the individual. Thus, readers' biases take hold before they can accurately analyze the individuals. Any implicit bias that journalists may have is portrayed in their reports and this influences not only how they deliver controversial stories, but also how the reader digests the stories. Research indicates that when Black people are negatively stereotyped in the news, the audience categorizes Black people and begins to expect those negative stereotypes (Entman 1992). Thus, journalists continue to deliver what is expected. This creates a vicious cycle of framed stories being affirmed by biases and biases being affirmed by framed stories. This study aims to assess this cycle and analyze how the media portrays police violence against Black Americans. This will be done by a content analysis of news coverage of the murders of Philando Castile and George Floyd. The type of language used to describe these racially motivated police violence will be observed. These two murders were chosen because they were the most prominent cases of police violence against Black men in the last decade. In addition, both murders were filmed and shared with the public. This

exposure made these cases a large topic of discussion amongst journalists nationwide. Using content analysis to analyze specific media texts, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. How were the victims of these murders described and presented by the media?
2. Conversely, how were the perpetrators of these murders described and presented by the media?
3. What are the lasting consequences of misrepresentation of race and police violence by the media?

This study seeks to provide an understanding of how the news media reported on the murders of Philando Castile and George Floyd and is exploratory in nature. Research regarding the reduction of implicit racial bias suggests that bringing awareness to the issue may facilitate long-term implicit-racial bias reduction (Nellis 2019). Thus, this study's goal is to contribute to the reduction of implicit racial bias in the media and society as a whole.

Literature Review

Overview

Over the last few decades, there have been a significant number of studies that explored the repercussions of unconscious bias within the criminal justice system. Research has evaluated how social conditions can interact with the operations of our subconscious to determine our responses to other people, especially in the context of race (Cottam 2015). Stereotyping is the primary way that individuals make these unconscious biases. Throughout history, Black Americans have been stereotyped to be violent and aggressive (Helg 2000). Black Americans were presented as frightful to "others" by American newspapers and media. This was done to help to establish a social hierarchy and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Helg 2000). This created two separate groups: an in-group and an out-group. This study provides a good foundation for the idea that Black Americans are viewed as violent but does not delve into how that stereotype is related to criminality and how this affects Black people.

As mentioned, stereotypes are the main way that biases come to fruition. Stereotypes influence judgment via categorization. This means that individuals will attribute stereotypical characteristics to other individuals based solely on their appearance and their relation to a particular social group. The cultural stereotype of black criminality can have an unconscious but substantial influence on the way that "people perceive individuals, process information, and form judgments" (Najdowski et al. 2015). This process negatively impacts Black people because citizens base stereotypes on limited interactions and assume that it is representative of the entire social category (Najdowski et al. 2015). This study aims to connect how stereotyping and media framing are intertwined and assess how that connection can negatively impact Black people, specifically Black men, in society.

News outlets have been categorized by political scientists as “an arena of problem construction” (Lawrence 2000). Scholars have long analyzed how media is used as a socially constructed representation of reality. News outlets aim to make a profit and attempt to reflect what they think is a representation of our societal views. However, what has newly interested scholars is the melding of the social construction of the news as part and parcel of larger political competitions to designate and define public problems (Lawrence 2000). Scholars argue that our societal problems may not exist objectively as much as they exist in perception. This means that what is understood as a problem can depend upon what perspectives of societal conditions are highlighted in the news (Lawrence 2000). Thus, if negative perceptions of Black men are being spread, then they will become viewed as a threat and problem in American society. Conversely, if negative perceptions regarding police violence are not being spread, then they will not be viewed as a threat and problem in American society. Lawrence (2000) details the power of the media in regard to policing; however, where all these studies lack is answering the following questions: What methods do news stations use when painting Black men specifically? Do these methods change when Black men are victims of violence? Further, do these methods change when Black men are victims of violence from people who are respected by society like police officers?

In order to attempt to answer these questions, this study focuses on the media coverage of the killings of Philando Castile and George Floyd. This study is an extension of existing research conducted by Chloe Jackson who conducted a content analysis of media coverage of the murders of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin. Similarly to this study, Jackson (2021) investigates the language used to describe Till and Martin in media to get insight into media framing, stereotypes, and biases against Black Americans. However, Jackson’s study focuses solely on Black youth.

Young Black men are unique in their own sphere of social sciences. Young people are most likely to be victims of violent crimes compared to older adults and in addition, tend to gain more sympathy than their older counterparts (Police Violence US Subnational Collaborators 2019). In addition, Jackson's study had a broader category of racially motivated crimes. This study aims to extend Jackson's research by focusing on older Black men and by introducing the complexity of the violence coming from police officers. This extra layer of intricacy challenges the relationship that Jackson established. How would media coverage change when the perpetrator is in a position of authority and societal respectability?

Philando Castile and George Floyd

On July 6, 2016, Philando Castile was fatally shot during a traffic stop by police officer Jeronimo Yanez. Castile was pulled over in a suburb of Minnesota. Research suggests that this stop was due to racial profiling. Audio recordings have the officers on record stating that Castile was pulled over because he looked like a recent robber suspect because of his "wideset nose" (Stanford University 2018). Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, and daughter were also present in the car at the time of the stop. Reynolds was responsible for the live stream that recorded the incident. When the officer asked for Castile's driver's license, he immediately informed the officer that he had a licensed firearm in the car. The officer told Castile not to reach for it or pull it out, and Castile replied that he was doing neither. However, merely seconds after, Castile was shot five times. The outbreak of this horrifying news resonated with Black Americans everywhere as this incident happened merely days after the killing of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (another act of racially motivated police violence). The live video stream garnered millions of views and people watched horrifically. The officers were charged with second-degree manslaughter and two counts of dangerous discharge of a firearm, however,

were eventually acquitted of all charges (Chappell 2016). This shooting re-ignited a national conversation about race and policing; however, the death of George Floyd was the catalyst that made the conversation spread nationwide.

Four years later, only 10 miles from where Castile was murdered, George Floyd lost his life. Floyd bought a pack of cigarettes from a local convenient store and the employee reported to the police that he thought the cash payment was counterfeit (BBC News 2020). Shortly after the call, two officers arrived. Floyd was sitting in his car outside of the corner store when one of the officers, guns already drawn, demanded Floyd to exit the car. Floyd was handcuffed and told that he was being detained for presenting a counterfeit bill. Tensions grew and when Floyd was being forced into the police cars, the altercation began to grow violent. One of the officers caused Floyd to fall to the ground and proceeded to place his left knee onto Floyd's neck, pushing him into the concrete (BBC News 2020). He held his knee on Floyd's neck for nearly ten minutes. According to reports, this goes against police policy and standards since, at that moment, Floyd was non-threatening and cooperative. Bystanders gathered and filmed the incident and listeners could hear Floyd's plea "Please, please, please, you're going to kill me, man." The officer dismissed his pleas and remained on his neck, even after Floyd became non-responsive and limp. Not even an hour later, Floyd was pronounced dead. This incident put a spotlight on not only the Minneapolis Police Department but police departments across America.

Police Brutality

The deaths of Castile and Floyd caused people to refocus on the presence of police violence in America. Police violence can be defined as any excessive and unwarranted use of force by law enforcement (Emesowum 2016). It is an extreme form of police misconduct and is a

civil rights violation. Police violence has been a constant battle for people of color. This can be traced back to the origins of the prison system. The function of the American police was never intended to prevent and investigate crime but rather to harass African Americans and some minorities (Emesowum 2016). Thus, America having the highest number of officer-involved killings (compared to mainstream developed countries) is no coincidence. More than 30,000 people have died from police violence in the United States from 1980 to 2018 with a majority of those victims being Black (Police Violence US Subnational Collaborators 2019). The effects of police brutality range from Black mental health concerns, mistrust in the American government, and an increase in racial discrimination in society. This study focuses on how police violence against Black men is portrayed in the media.

Media Representation and Framing

In order to understand how media uses framing to influence how the public perceives and views Black men, it is important to understand what framing is as an overarching idea. The framing theory is an approach to studying how individuals process information (Davie 2015) Framing suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called “the frame”) influences the choices people make about how to process that information (Davie 2015). For example, take two ice cream brands. One says, “10 percent fat” and another says “90 percent fat-free” (Boyce 2021), Both options are logically identical situations, yet the second option is more attractive because it seems like the healthier option. This theory was developed by notable sociologist Erving Goffman. He believes that there are two realms of framing: natural and social. Natural surrounds physical occurrences that happen in an individual's life that can influence the choices people make about how to process specific information (Goffman 1974). Social framing surrounds socially driven occurrences that happen to influence people’s choices (Goffman 1974).

This area of framing is most relevant to this study. Media framing is a subcategory of social framing. The media serves as a vessel for which individuals develop their social heuristics. Thus, media framing simply is the angle or perspective from which a news story is told, and this angle has the power to influence people choice's and how they process specific information (Critical Media Review 2015). When studying media framing, we are searching beyond what is simply stated but analyzing the parameters of the discussion itself. It is important to look deeper into the words, symbols, overall content, and tone used to frame the topic. Media framing influences media representation for all individuals and is an important topic to understand.

Theory and Hypothesis

The main phenomenon associated with racial bias in modern society is social heuristics, most specifically stereotypes. This is relevant in the study because this representative heuristic involves individuals making judgments on others based solely on how much they look in relation to people they have met before (Cottam 2015). This is subconscious evaluation can lead to biases against marginalized people. For example, American society has stereotyped homeless individuals as lazy or as drug addicts (Weng 2017). This stereotype can be detrimental to these individuals finding employment or housing as these biases persist. Interestingly, people typically use heuristics as a quick shortcut to help us as individuals try to understand what is happening around us (Cottam 2015). Humans do this because it is not always feasible to stop and do thorough research on every situation that we are in. People do not have the time, so they utilize heuristics to fill in any breaks in our knowledge. What is interesting is that hypothetically, heuristics should not play a role in the media. Journalists must obtain as many facts and pieces of information as possible. They review videos and statements, analyze the circumstances of the incident, and are guided through the decision-making process. Yet, there are many negative narratives about Black Americans that are detrimental. Stigmas are reinforced by the news and other media and outlets paint Black Americans, specifically Black men, as more aggressive. This causes the entire community to be associated with gangs, violence, and even crime (Kellstedt 2000). I theorize that this happens because of a closely related sociological phenomenon known as race stereotyping.

Race stereotyping is making a generalized assumption about an individual solely based on their race (Cottam 2015). These stereotypes always have a negative effect on the individual being stereotyped. Stereotypes of Black Americans are engraved in American culture due to its

long history of racism and discrimination. In fact, stereotypes was how many slaveholders justified their actions (Westerkemp 1986). This justification for slavery trickled into the justification of racism. At the peak of the civil rights movement, anti-integrationists declared that the separation of the races was God-given and that God made differences in color for a reason (Westerkemp 1986). This continued to evolve and was apparent in our laws and how we incriminate and categorize Black Americans. Now, decades later Black Americans are suffering the consequences because these stereotypes have been repeated from generation to generation and children learn these stereotypes and negative attitudes and use them in their everyday life. This is known as the social learning theory (Cottam 2015). Thus, even when all the facts are presented, these biases can surface. These biases do not magically decimate because of a title or rank. Police officers must make a conscious and intentional effort to not allow their biases to overcome their proper judgment.

I think these are the best theories to use as they encompass the core of the issue of why we have racial discrimination within the police system. This racial bias remains even when all other outside factors (age, gender, education) are taken into account. Police hold racial stereotypes because of the center of whiteness in American society and the negative portrayal of Black Americans in media and history. Thus, before the situation is evaluated, these perceptions are the first things that come to mind due to the human nature of using representative heuristics. These stereotypes are now the lens through which police are making decisions. This clouded lens blocks law enforcement from evaluating the situation at hand in an unbiased way and as a result, this clouded judgment is used when they make their decisions. This results in Black Americans being victims of police brutality and being affiliated with negative stereotypes. I hypothesize that

these biases are only heightened by the media specifically in the cases of Philando Castile and George Floyd. I hypothesize that the results of this study's research questions will be as follows:

H1: All news articles evaluated will negatively represent Philando Castile and George Floyd and frame the stories to depict them as aggressive, uncooperative, and dangerous.

H2. Conversely, all news articles evaluated will positively represent the officers and frame the stories to depict them as misunderstood and mistaken.

H3: The lasting consequences of misrepresentation of race and police violence are increased racial tensions and violence.

Methodology

Overview

This study uses a content analysis of three newspapers that reported on the deaths of Philando Castile and George Floyd. A content analysis serves as the best methodology to understand how media framing relates to stereotyping because it allows the researcher to detect and analyze patterns of negative depictions of Black men directly from the sources. All news articles for this study were pulled from a period no more than two weeks after each incident. The news articles used in this study covering the Castile murder were the week of July 6, 2016; and the news articles covering Floyd's murder were published the week of May 25, 2020. These periods were chosen because they encompass the period of the most salient coverage. This is also to uphold the integrity of journalists' initial and primary views. The sample contains articles from journalists whose news organizations' standards are the priority and are not influenced by public reaction. The sample and results would be skewed if articles were used from weeks after the incidents where public scrutiny could influence how newspapers report.

Coding System

Newspaper articles were carefully analyzed and information from each article was categorized (see Appendix A). To expand upon Jackson's work in, the following list is an explanation of the variables that the I looked for (some variables are similar while others are tailored to this specific study):

1. Perpetrator vs. Victim: the language portrays Philando Castile / George Floyd as the perpetrator or victim or neither.

- *Perpetrator*: the person who commits or is responsible for the crime

- *Victim*: the person who is harmed because of the crime (Jackson 2021)

Were words such as aggressive used? Were Castile and George's statuses as victims completely disregarded? Due to the stereotypes of Black men, there is a low level of sympathy even when they are victims of violence. This section was included to detect whether newspapers objectively described Castile and Floyd as victims rather than perpetrators.

2. Police Accountability vs Apologetic/Deflective: Did the language that portrays the officers hold them accountable or deflect them from accountability? Were the police officers scrutinized? Was this deemed as a crime or as a mistake? Does the article push for accountability of the officer(s)? This section was included because journalists often portray police violence as a simple mistake or journalists will discuss the officers' background or high ranks before discussing the incident of events.

3. Racial Discrimination Emphasized vs Racial Discrimination Deemphasized: Does the article mention (or not mention) the racially motivated aspect of the violence. Was race mentioned? This section was included to determine if race is seen as secondary or irrelevant. Journalists tend to take violence against Black men as an individualized event and when Black men are violent it is a reflection of the entire group.

4. Other: both coded and uncoded language. This section was included because, unlike words that explicitly represent Black men in a negative light (thug, dangerous), certain

language is coded and can covertly give a negative portrayal or victim blame (confrontational, did not comply) (Jackson 2021).

Unit of Analysis

Newspaper articles from the *StarTribune*, *Kare11*, and the *New York Times* were analyzed for this study. The choice of the newspapers was based on location and accessibility. The *StarTribune* is located in Minneapolis, the city where both Castile and Floyd were murdered. *StarTribune* is the largest newspaper in Minneapolis and dates back to 1867. The articles for analysis were accessed directly through the newspaper's website (startribune.com) and the search filter was used to find articles about Philando Castile and George Floyd.

Kare11 is also located in Minneapolis. *Kare11* delivers local news and community events throughout the area. The articles for analysis were accessed directly through the newspaper's website (Kare11.com) and the search filter was used to find articles about Philando Castile and George Floyd.

The *New York Times* is considered a reputable, mainstream publication. The far proximity from the murders of Castile and Floyd gives a fresh perspective that offsets the proximity of the *StarTribune* and *Kare11*. Jackson's study also included the *New York Times* because the size and reach of the *New York Times* allows the me to analyze the perspective of journalists who were not local to the crimes (Jackson 2021). By also using the *New York Times* in this study results will hopefully overlap with Jackson's study. The articles for analysis were accessed directly through the newspaper's website (nytimes.com) and the search filter was used to find articles about Philando Castile and George Floyd.

Findings

Thirty articles were selected to analyze for this study. Of this number, ten articles were selected from each of the following publications: the *StarTribune*, *Kare11*, and the *New York Times*. From each newspaper, five articles were analyzed for Philando Castile, and five articles were analyzed for George Floyd. I did not use articles that were deemed as “opinion” pieces or that simply listed a chain of events. I picked the five longest and most dense articles.

Table 1 and Table 2 show the percentage of occurrences according to the unit of analysis, Perpetrator vs. Victim. I indicated if they saw Castile or Floyd were definitively described as a perpetrator or victim by indicating “perpetrator,” “victim,” or “NDC”. In Table 1, the variable with the least number of occurrences across all three newspapers is “perpetrator.” The death of Castile was live-streamed, and his daughter and girlfriend were present during his death. Thus, it would be difficult to justify establishing Castile as a perpetrator. However, what is interesting is the substantial amount of “NDC”. It should be apparent that an individual who was shot without harming anyone is a victim. Yet, there are many news articles that are not conveying that message.

Table 1. Occurrences According to Perpetrator vs. Victim for Philando Castile

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Perpetrator	Victim	No definitive conclusion
<i>StarTribune</i>	5	0%	20%	80%
<i>Kare11</i>	5	0%	60%	60%
<i>New York Times</i>	5	20%	40%	40%

In Table 2, the variable with the least number of occurrences across all three newspapers is “perpetrator.” The death of Floyd was recorded by a bystander and his pleas for help were heard by everyone around. Thus, it would be difficult to justify establishing Floyd as a perpetrator. Also, the majority of all three newspapers categorized Floyd as a victim. I hypothesize that this is because Floyd was very vocal in his pleas repeating “Please, I can't breathe” more than 20 times (Singh 2020).

Table 2. Occurrences According to Perpetrator vs. Victim for George Floyd

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Perpetrator	Victim	No definitive conclusion
<i>StarTribune</i>	5	20%	60%	20%
<i>Kare11</i>	5	0%	80%	20%
<i>New York Times</i>	5	0%	80%	20%

Table 3 and Table 4 show the percentage of occurrences according to the unit of analysis, Police Accountability vs Apologetic/Deflective. I indicated if journalists indicated if the officers who killed Castile or Floyd should be held accountable. Accountability (i.e were words such as “responsibility” or “justice” used) or were the writers sympathetic/deflective (i.e mentioning officers' service or character neglecting to mention them at all). In Table 3, the variable with the most number of occurrences across all three newspapers is “deflection.” Within many of the articles, the police officer who shot Castile was either quickly mentioned and dismissed or the article focused on his upstanding background and not the crime that occurred.

Table 3. Occurrences According to Police Accountability vs Apologetic/Deflective for Philando Castile

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Accountability	Deflection
<i>StarTribune</i>	5	20%	80%
<i>Kare11</i>	5	40%	60%
<i>New York Times</i>	5	40%	60%

In Table 4, the variable with the most number of occurrences across *Kare11* and the *New York Times* is “accountability.” The majority of the articles mentioned how justice should be served and that police violence cannot continue in the Minneapolis community. However, for the *StarTribune*, the variable with the most number of occurrences is “deflection”. The majority of those articles did not mention the larger issue of police violence and used deflection to steer away from addressing police violence.

Table 4. Occurrences According to Police Accountability vs Apologetic/Deflective for George Floyd

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Accountability	Deflection
<i>StarTribune</i>	5	40%	60%
<i>Kare11</i>	5	60%	40%
<i>New York Times</i>	5	80%	20%

For all articles evaluated, all articles made race the most prominent issue when reporting. Table 5 and Table 6 show the percentage of occurrences according to the unit of analysis, Racial Discrimination Emphasized vs Racial Discrimination Deemphasized. I indicated if the issue of racial discrimination was emphasized (points to larger issues beyond the individual event) or was racial discrimination deemphasized or dismissed. In Table 5, the variable with the most number of occurrences across all three newspapers is “race discrimination deemphasized”. Journalists made the race of Philando Castile apparent but did not mention the racial discrimination aspect of the incident. In fact, some articles failed to mention the race of the officers at all. Journalists portrayed the incident as an individualized event and did not address the larger social issue of racial discrimination within the police department.

Table 5. Occurrences of Racial Discrimination Emphasized vs Racial Discrimination Deemphasized for Philando Castile

Newspaper	Number of Articles	RD Emphasized	RD Deemphasized
StarTribune	5	40%	60%
Kare11	5	20%	80%
New York Times	5	20%	80%

In Table 6, the variable with the most number of occurrences across the local newspapers is “race discrimination deemphasized.” Local journalists did not mention the racial dynamic of the incident. I hypothesize this is to not draw negative attention to the city of Minneapolis. However, the nationwide newspaper, the *New York Times*, emphasized the racial discrimination

aspect of the incident. I hypothesize this is because of the large amount of backlash and protests after the death of Philando Castile.

Table 6. Occurrences of Racial Discrimination Emphasized vs Racial Discrimination Deemphasized for George Floyd

Newspaper	Number of Articles	RD Emphasized	RD Deemphasized
StarTribune	5	20%	80%
Kare11	5	0%	100%
New York Times	5	80%	20%

The final unit of analysis is Other. I wrote any language they saw that portrayed Castile and Floyd in a negative light in a covert manner. Some articles used the words “drugs”, “resistance”, “brute”, and “hostile” in association with the death of Floyd. In the context of the articles in which these words were found, they relate to not only damaging representation but victim-blaming, as well (Jackson 2021).

Analysis and Conclusion

Question 1

Stereotyping affects not only the individual being stereotyped but also the individual doing the stereotyping. An individual's view of the world and society is limited when relying on stereotypes. This topic is of high importance for sociology because it is a subject that impacts a large portion of the population. There is countless research about the stereotypes facing the Black community and the impact of racism in the criminal justice system, but few studies have analyzed how Black victims of police violence are stereotyped in the media. This study set out to examine the representation and framing of police violence victims Philando Castile and George Floyd. By using racial framing as the theoretical framework and conducting a content analysis, the research questions guiding this study can be answered. The research questions are:

Question 1: How were the victims of these murders described and presented by the media?

The media has the responsibility of reporting in a manner that is informative and detailed. Thus, it should be apparent and distinctive who the victims and perpetrators of crimes are. Journalists should also be reporting in an objective manner. Objectivity in reporting means only the facts, removing any emotional tones, and representing both sides fairly (Schudson 2001). This study suggests that bias was found in the articles used for analysis.

Question 1- Philando Castile

First, articles from the *StarTribune* regarding Philando Castile attempted to remain as undistinctive as possible. A majority of the articles analyzed from the *StarTribune* did not identify explicitly who the victim and perpetrator were. They left it up to the reader to identify. This is unjust as this leaves room for readers' internal and implicit biases to take precedent. When reporting on homicides and murders, it should not be up to interpretation of who suffered

from the incident. It should be explicitly stated. Victim identification is an objective characteristic, not a subjective one. Overall, the journalists' writings were influenced by any implicit biases they had, despite attempts to remain objective (Entman, 1992). In addition, the race of the victim was made the most prominent issue but the racial discrimination present in the incident, an integral aspect of the issue, was not addressed in most of the articles from the *StarTribune*.

In comparison, articles from *Kare11* were more distinctive from those of the *StarTribune*. *Kare11* properly identified Castile as the victim. Journalists explicitly stated the details of the crime and reported them objectively. However, *Kare11* also did not address the racial discrimination aspect of the murder. Eighty percent of their articles failed to mention the race of the offender or deemphasized the issue. This is an area of concern for many reasons. Firstly, it individualized the event and fails to identify patterns of racially motivated police violence. If these patterns are not identified, the issue cannot be solved. In addition, failing to mention racial prejudice hurts future research on the topic. Future researchers will not be able to find information needed regarding racially motivated crimes if they are not categorized as such.

Finally, the *New York Times* was nearly evenly split in their identification. Almost half of the articles identified Castile as a victim while the other half had no definitive conclusion. In addition, one of the articles leans towards identifying Castile as the perpetrator by emphasizing his past traffic stops and his possession of a firearm. This is a clouded perspective. Multiple reports of the incident indicated that the firearm was appropriately registered, and Castile properly informed the officer of its presence (Forliti 2017). However, it was framed by the media to indicate that Castile was threatening. In addition, a majority of the articles from the *New York Times* did not address the racial discrimination aspect of the murder. Again, this is an area of

concern for all the reasons previously mentioned. Overall, all newspapers in this study deemphasized the aspect of racial discrimination in the death of Philando Castile. However, results indicated a change in the death of George Floyd.

Question 1- George Floyd

First, articles from the *StarTribune* regarding George Floyd were more objective than those of Philando Castile. A majority of the articles analyzed from the *StarTribune* properly identified George Floyd as the victim and did not leave it up to the reader to identify. I hypothesize this change in reporting may have been from the backlash received in Philando Castile's case. Many protestors stormed the city of Minneapolis and demanded that justice be served for Castile. Reports show that hundreds of people gathered at the Minnesota State Capitol holding signs that included the phrases "black lives matter," and "no justice, no peace," and hundreds more gathered onto Interstate 94 and blocked traffic for more than an hour (Kennedy 2017). That occurrence may have influenced how journalists chose to report as they want to appease their audience. However, again the racial discrimination present in the incident, an integral aspect of the issue, was not addressed in the majority of the articles from the *StarTribune*.

In comparison, articles from *Kare11* were again more distinctive than those of the *StarTribune*. The overwhelming majority of the articles from *Kare11* properly identified Floyd as the victim. Journalists explicitly stated the details of the crime and reported them objectively. However, *Kare11* again did not address the racial discrimination aspect of the murder. In fact, the results were worse for the case of George Floyd. I hypothesize that this has to do with the location of *Kare11* and the *StarTribune*. Local newspapers do not want to address the issue of

racial discrimination in their city. If they were to address the issue, they also have to accept it in reality.

Finally, the *New York Times* was the most distinctive in its identification of George Floyd as a victim. Eighty percent of their articles properly identified Floyd as the victim (an increase of 40% from Castile's). The largest change is the degree to which the *New York Times* addressed the racial discrimination aspect of the murder. Eighty percent of their articles addressed the issue of racial discrimination in Floyd's murder (an increase of 60% from Castile's). Police violence on a nationwide scale became a prominent issue by the year 2020. Reports show that activists across America and worldwide rose to fight against police brutality and racism in the American policing system (Smith 2020). In addition, numerous legislative proposals on every level in the United States were presented to combat police misconduct (Smith 2020). Overall, local newspapers in this study deemphasized the aspect of racial discrimination for the death of George Floyd while the national newspaper emphasized the aspect of race discrimination.

Question 2: Conversely, how were the perpetrators of these murders described and presented by the media?

Question 2- Philando Castile

Perpetrators of murders are typically described in an objective manner with some homicides more likely to receive more newspaper coverage than others. However, what happens when perpetrators do not fit this stereotype is interesting. The perpetrators in the cases of Philando Castile and George Floyd have an occupation that is well respected in society. Police officers are viewed as heroic, brave, and selfless. The question this study addresses is are these stereotypes perpetuated despite being the perpetrators of a violent crime.

Firstly, articles from the *StarTribune* regarding the officers involved in the killing of Philando Castile attempted to remain as deflection as possible. A majority of the articles analyzed from the *StarTribune* did not address the larger issue of police violence. Minneapolis has had a series of police-related violence before the death of Philando Castile. In 2006, 19-year-old Fong Lee was shot eight times by officers due to the claim that he had a gun. However, multiple reports indicated that the gun had been in police possession since 2004 (Ajasa 2021). In 2012, Mike Spann was beaten outside a bar by three Minneapolis officers while using racial slurs (Ajasa 2021). In 2015, 24-year-old Jamar Clark was shot by officers while handcuffed (Ajasa 2021). It is biased journalism to not indicate the larger issue of police violence. Eighty percent of the articles from the *StarTribune* failed to mention the larger issue of unjust police accountability. This is a disservice to readers as they do not get all information to form proper opinions on the subject.

In comparison, articles from *Kare11* were also deflection but not as deflection as the *StarTribune*. The majority of the articles from *Kare11* did not address the larger issue of police violence. In addition, journalists went beyond mere deflection and focused on the positives of officers' history and background. They mentioned their ranks, their years serving in the police department, and how the officers from the incident were "best friends since high school". These types of descriptors deflect from the real issue of police violence. These types of descriptors are indicators that there is a level of positive bias for police officers. Even when they are the perpetrators of a crime, they are still held in high regard. This is unjust because it leaves victims of police violence feeling unheard and insignificant. It again individualizes the incident and fails to establish patterns of police violence in America. Future researchers again, will not be able to find information needed regarding police violence if they are not categorized as such.

Finally, the *New York Times* had similar results to those of *Kare11*. The majority of their articles deflected but not as much as the *StarTribune*. Sixty percent of the articles from the *New York Times* did not mention the larger issue of police violence. Overall, none of the articles in this study indicated that journalists reported police violence against Philando Castile in an unbiased manner. However, results indicated the reports changed for the death of George Floyd.

Question 2 – George Floyd

First, articles from the *StarTribune* regarding the officers involved in the killing of George Floyd attempted to remain deflective, however, slightly less deflective than with the case of Castile. A majority of the articles analyzed from the *StarTribune* did not address the larger issue of police violence. In addition, of the few reports on the outrage and protests that occurred after the death of George Floyd, the *StarTribune* focused on the negative aspects of these protests. Some articles described the protests as “clashing”, “heavy tension”, and “hostile”. This is coded language to negatively describe the protests without explicitly going against them. This is a technique of media framing that is used by journalists to appear objective while expressing their biases.

In comparison, articles from *Kare11* flipped in their description of the officers. The majority of the articles from *Kare11* addressed the issue of police violence and focused on police accountability and justice. Sixty percent of the articles from *Kare11* described the officers as “reckless”. This switch is interesting because within the same city, two local newspapers reported differently. Thousands around Minneapolis rose to protest against police brutality and demanded justice for George Floyd. *Kare11* triumphantly reported the protests, using words such as “movement” and “justice”.

Finally, the *New York Times* had a substantial change. Eighty percent of the articles addressed the issues of racial discrimination surrounding Floyd's murder. I hypothesize that this increase occurred because justice Floyd's death became one of the most monumental movements in United States history. In demonstrations that drew millions in cities across the country and abroad, protesters called for police reform while mourning the death of yet another unarmed Black person at the hands of police in the United States (Deliso 2021). As a prominent national newspaper, the *New York Times* had no choice but to reflect the perspective and attitude of society. This movement was so vast that it would have been futile to attempt to influence public opinion.

Question 3

Question 3: What are the lasting consequences of misrepresentation of race and police violence by the media?

Misrepresentation in the media has lasting effects on marginalized groups in America. Kaspar Stieler, a prominent scholar in the 18th century, argued that the most consequences of exposure to newspapers are that individuals can "investigate the world" and long-term exposure can lead to the development of stereotypic memory traces, which, in turn, can influence individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Mastro 2009). In relation to race and policing, if misrepresentation continues individuals can develop memory traces that automatically correlate Black men as violent and police officers as righteous. This will continue the cycle of discrimination throughout our societal system.

However, the effects of misrepresentation can be overcome. To combat misrepresentation in the media the following steps can be taken to limit the negative impact of stereotypes in the media and maximize the positive benefits media may have on our attitudes toward out-groups

(Sharples and Page-Gould 2016). In a study conducted by the University of Toronto, they found that if we are exposed to positive interactions between members of different social groups, we are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the individuals of those social groups (Sharples and Page-Gould 2016). In sum to combat misrepresentation with race, policing, or even gender, what is the priority is being exposed not necessarily to a positive representation of each group, but a positive representation of interactions between groups. This exposure, in addition, will decrease concerns about interacting with different groups in individuals' personal lives. Using this method will ensure that biases being perpetuated by the media will not cloud individual judgment.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of this study is the small sample size and the limited number of variables. Having a larger sample of news articles would have allowed for better comparison. In addition, having a large variety of variables would have allowed for a richer and deeper study. However, due to time constraints and limited access to articles, this was not possible.

Future Studies

Expanding this study by including Black women who have also died due to police violence and negligence. Women such as Breonna Taylor and Atatiana Jefferson were both killed in their homes. Typically, women are garnered more sympathy in the criminal justice system than men. However, this luxury is not extended to Black women. In fact, African American women are more likely than women of other races to go to prison during their lifetimes (Department of Justice 2003). Black women are stereotyped as angry and overbearing. Thus, it would bring a

fresh perspective to analyze how the media would describe them when they are victims of violence.

Appendix A

Newspaper _____

Codes:

Article: 1-10 per newspaper

Perpetrator vs. Victim: 1=perpetrator, 2=victim, 3= no definitive conclusion

Police Accountability vs Apologetic/Deflective: 1=high presence of PA 2= low presence of PA

Race Emphasized vs Race Deemphasized: 1=emphasized, 2=deemphasized

Other: negative words/phrases outside of listed categories

Article	Perpetrator v Victim			PA		Race Relations		Other
	1	2	3	1	2	1	2	
Total								

Appendix B: Articles from *StarTribune* used in content

	Article	Date
1	Philando Castile shooting: What we know so far	07/07/2016
2	Quiet, unassuming Philando Castile was 'like Mr. Rogers with dreadlocks'	07/08/2016
3	Falcon Heights police shooting reverberates across the nation	07/08/2016
4	Police audio: Officer stopped Philando Castile on robbery suspicion	07/12/2016
5	Philando Castile was caught up in a cycle of traffic stops, fines	07/15/2016
6	What we know about Derek Chauvin and Tou Thao, two of the officers caught on tape in the death of George Floyd	05/26/2020
7	Minneapolis police, protesters clash almost 24 hours after George Floyd's death in custody	05/27/2020
8	Minneapolis releases transcript of 911 call that led to George Floyd's fatal encounter with police	05/28/2020
9	A timeline of events leading to George Floyd's death as outlined in charging documents	06/04/2020
10	Personnel records shed light on four Minneapolis police officers charged in George Floyd's death	06/04/2020

Appendix C: Articles from Kare11 used in content

	Article	Date
1	Man shot by St. Anthony officer dies	07/07/2016
2	Police shoot, kill man during traffic stop Minnesota	07/08/2016
3	KARE 11 Investigates: Racial profiling in Minnesota	07/08/2016
4	Lawyer: Cop who shot Castile thought he was robbery suspect	07/10/2016
5	Falcon Heights residents voice concerns over Castile shooting	07/28/2016
6	Minneapolis police officers fired after death of man recorded saying 'I can't breathe'	05/26/2020
7	Derek Chauvin charged with 3rd degree murder, manslaughter in death of George Floyd	05/29/2020
8	Former officers charged in George Floyd's death appear in court	06/04/2020
9	George Floyd mural in Houston's Third Ward aims to keep memory alive	06/09/2020
10	Fired Minneapolis officer Thomas Lane released on bond	06/10/2020

Appendix D: Articles from *NewYorkTimes* used in content

	Article	Date
1	A Killing. A Pointed Gun. And Two Black Lives, Witnessing.	07/07/2016
2	Minnesota Officer Was ‘Reacting to the Presence of a Gun,’ Lawyer Says	07/09/2016
3	Peaceful Protests Follow Minnesota Governor’s Call for Calm	07/08/2016
4	Police and Protesters Clash in Minnesota Capital	07/10/2016
5	Minnesota Police Officer’s ‘Bulletproof Warrior’ Training Is Questioned	07/14/2016
6	‘I Can’t Breathe’: 4 Minneapolis Officers Fired After Black Man Dies in Custody	05/26/2020
7	Bystander Videos of George Floyd and Others Are Policing the Police	05/26/2016
8	Minneapolis Police, Long Accused of Racism, Face Wrath of Wounded City	05/27/2016
9	How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody	05/31/2016
10	N.Y.C. Protests Turn Violent	05/31/2016

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