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Abstract

Communication and media studies scholars have commonly accepted that the news media has significant influence on the public, so the tendency to marginalize protest groups as socially deviant, can have serious implications for the cause being protested. This two-part qualitative study first examined news coverage of racially charged protests surrounding the controversial judicial ruling regarding the death of Trayvon Martin. News coverage of protests that followed the verdict was analyzed based on elements consistent with Framing theory, using a Critical Discourse Analysis methodology. The second part of the study analyzed the same news articles corresponding comment sections, in order to examine the public's social commentary regarding the protest reported on in the news articles. This study examines how biased speech in news journalism can influence public opinion, ultimately negatively affecting protests and protested causes. The news articles varied with respect to their coverage of the events, consistent with framing theory, and as a result revealed several dominant themes within their comment sections. Themes were reflective of both individual news articles and their comment sections, as well as contained overarching themes among all articles. This research ultimately helps to establish the direct relationships between news reporting, and its effect on the attitudes and sentiments expressed by the public.

KEYWORDS: *News Reporting, Framing, Protest, Social Impact, Social Commentary.*

Black Lives Matter?

Reporting Styles and The Public's Acceptance or Rejection of Racially Charged Protest

By,

Alexandria J. Haynes

B.A., City University of New York: Hunter College

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Media
Studies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On February 26, 2012, a 17-year old high school student visiting his father, walked home from purchasing candy and an iced tea at a local convenience store in Sanford, Florida, he was followed, questioned, then shot and killed by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman (Huffington, 2012). His name was Trayvon Martin. The criminal court case between Martin and Zimmerman has been described as “racially polarizing as the O.J. Simpson trial” (Bates, 2018). Protests were held in response to both the shooting and Zimmerman’s acquittal (Upright, 2013), which sparked national debate over “Stand Your Ground” laws, their potential to be a legal loophole exploited in cases that result in the death of black peoples (Ackermann, 2015; Eng, 2012), and racial injustice in America.

Racial injustice, discrimination, and bias towards the African American community referred to herein out as the Black community, for the majority of American history was both openly embraced socially, as well as legally accepted (Banks, R. R., Eberhardt, J. L., & Ross, L. 2006). Today, social consensus rejects both legal and social racial bias or discrimination against the Black community. While overt racial discrimination is socially denounced and legally barred, racism and racial bias are embedded in the fabric of this country’s history (Lawrence, K., & Keleher, T, 2004), and still affect the minority community. The focus then becomes not so much if racial bias is present or practiced, but rather how, what, and who is maintaining it currently? This question is particularly important in helping to understand the formation of racial attitudes when one’s direct contact with Black peoples is limited, and therefore, so is their understanding of causes which affect them.

One such way people form their opinions and attitudes, racial or otherwise, is through their engagement with “news media,” and the consumption of news (Arendt, 2015), which

constructs “realities of the world beyond the immediate... reality of the viewer/ listener” (Montgomery, 2009). The term “news media” is used to refer to both print and broadcast media (News Media, n.d). In recent decades the term can additionally refer to digital news platforms which are inclusive of both online newspapers and news blogs (Newman, 2012). News media functions as a tool which both “informs and entertains” the general public by circulating information regarding topics like politics, entertainment, cultural events, and social issues (Campbell, Martin, Fabos, 2014). “News is not a natural phenomenon emerging straight from ‘reality,’ but a product. It is produced by an industry, shaped by the relations between the media and other industries...” (Fowler, 1991; as cited in Xie, 2018).

Whether people have seen a traditional news program on television, read a report recently on a news website, or obtained their news through a social media platform, it is regularly being consumed (Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Barthel, M., & Shearer, E, 2016). Researcher and self-proclaimed “cultural materialist,” Bonnie Brennen, asserts that cultural products such as newspapers, television programs, or even social media platforms such as Facebook, or Twitter, “provide us with insights about our society at a particular historical place and time” (Brennen, 2013). As this may very well be the case, it begs the question: with the all the reports on mounting racial tensions, and ever-present social injustices (Burt, C. H., Simons, R. L., & Gibbons, F. X., 2012), what insights about the current state of our American society are our newspapers capturing about us right now?

According to psychologist Dr. Renee Carr, “humans are prone to negative bias and negative potency”; as a result, audiences are attracted to and give negative events or information more attention than they would positive (Page, 2017). Due to this human propensity, journalists’ and news platforms may be more inclined to pander to, or “sensationalize,” news, such as the

Martin case. This journalistic practice tends to diminish the empathy and emotional response the public has when viewing such news, which is primarily based on whether one can relate to the victim or disaster (Page, 2017). Therefore, the ability of the general public to connect with race-related tragedies such as the Martin case may be even further diminished by those who do not relate to him personally as a victim or that type of disaster. When it comes to reporting these racialized incidents or how communities of color, particularly Black Americans, are represented in the news, a journalist may also have this disconnect. In large part, this issue stems from “the elite background of the typical journalist, who tends to be white, male, highly educated, and relatively affluent” (The News Media. n.d.). As a result of societal or economic status, important issues about racial minorities may be unconsciously ignored and or overlooked by the “typical journalist” (Campbell, C. P., LeDuff, K. M., Jenkins, C. D., & Brown, R. A, 2012).

The way a social group is characterized, particularly by the news media, affects both how they are perceived and related to by the public. This relationship is considered impactful, as “the less evaluative and more factual generalizations appear, the less questionable and more naturalized they become” (Christians, C. G., Ferré, J. P., & Fackler, M, 1993, p. 14). To this effect, Teo (2000), specifically studied the construction of racism within the practice of news reporting. Teo’s study of racism delved into the different effects of “subtle, covert, (and) insidious” racism in the news, which he asserted differed from the past “overt” racism such as “verbal or physical abuse of an ethnic group” (Teo, 2000). This form of modern day, or “new racism” (Van Dijk, 1992), increasingly takes on the form of “victim blaming” (Teo, 2000). Consequently, for the African-American community, this is often exemplified by the narration or “stereotype” that Black people are poor, uneducated, and jobless, due to their own drive or

reliance on welfare (Teo, 2000). These stereotypes entirely negate cause and effect by looking past the systems of operation Black peoples have historically faced.

Language plays a critical role in the production and continued transmission of stereotypes as our main connections as humans are linguistic; it is, therefore, “the matrix of humanity...” according to H. Richard Niebuhr (Christians et al., 1993). A human tendency for people when communicating or retelling a story is to emphasize the points which were personally considered the most imperative (Christians et al., 1993). To this point, one of the most overlooked ways news articles continuously perpetrates racial discrimination, has been concealed directly in the foundation of the article, within the language (Christians et al., 1993). For instance, cultural stereotypes have historically associated Black peoples with or blamed them for violent crime, both in news reporting, and TV dramas (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). As a result, research has found that White people identify things commonly associated with crime, such as a gun, with a Black person faster than they would with a White person (Payne, 2001).

As such, the Black community has historically faced biases within news reporting, which both underreport stories of social injustice or issues of the systematic oppression they face, while over-representing stories of their purported criminality (Dixon, T.L., Linz, D., 2001). These journalistic pitfalls have made for a particularly strenuous relationship between news outlets and organized social protest movement ‘Black Lives Matter’, also known as BLM. BLM was founded in response to the killing of Martin (Simmons, 2017), and subsequent acquittal of Zimmerman, by three black community organizers: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (Hunt, 2015). BLM initially began as an online campaign that used social media to leverage support, call out, and call attention to the injustices faced by the Black community (Choudhury, 2016). According to Cullors, the groups message and movement was intended to

operate both in an online space, as well as to “mobilize protests in the streets” (Robinson, 2018, n.p), and to “intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (Black Lives Matter, 2013, n.p), by organizing protests against police brutality and the systematic racism faced by the Black community (Friedersdorf, 2017). Protests are therefore defined as “sites of contestation in which bodies, symbols, identities, practices, and discourses are used to pursue or prevent changes in institutionalized power relations” (Ciurel, 2018, p.8).

As BLM was becoming a nationally recognized name, its media coverage became amplified, leading to heightened questioning of the ethics of news coverage which marginalize protest groups, particularly those protesting racialized matters (Leopold, J., & Bell, M. P, 2017). News reporting has a particular function of leading the public, and due to a variety of factors, such as race, or religion, for example, there is ideological content hidden in its discourse (Van Dijk, 2006). While this content may be subtle and not consciously understood by the audience, its influence and effect may have some not so subtle effects. This begs the question, how is the public’s emotional response or “call to action” directly affected if the information they are consuming is marginalizing or biased, as the result of certain journalistic practices?

This research is aimed at analyzing if protestors of the Martin case were disparaged within news coverage surrounding the protest, and then if, or how, that gained or lost the support of the public. This is accomplished by analyzing (1) positive or negative coverage of protest/ protestors, (2) how that coverage affected the support for the protested cause. In particular, this research seeks to identify what specific themes present within the news reports surrounding the protest affected the public the most. These themes are revealed by exploring reader feedback from the news articles. In conducting this research, it is the intent to reveal the biased discourse

embedded in news journalism, which both disparages protest groups and influences public opinion and discourse.

The next chapter of this study provides a more in-depth review of past literature which better develops Framing theory, the effects of news media on protest movements, news biases, and impact on public engagement, all concepts which past researchers have found relevant to the topics. The theory mentioned above was utilized as it was believed to have the most relevance to the study of how news coverage influences or affects members of the public's appeal to accept or reject a protest movement, as well as the role that race can play in said coverage. Following the Literature review, the Methods chapter will outline both the data collection and data analysis processes. Critical Discourse Analysis is explicated and explored as the primary method of analysis for the research. The Results chapter then discusses the studies overall findings and introduces both themes which were directly examined from the research questions, as well as a few important themes which were present in the data but unrelated to the research questions. The Discussion chapter will examine the study's findings concerning both the theories utilized, and the research questions asked. Lastly, the Conclusion chapter of this paper will summarize the purpose and findings of the study, discuss the research's limitations, as well as explore potential future research directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a more in-depth review of previous literature and research, which served to develop the effects of news media on protest movements better. The purpose of this literature review is to introduce Framing theories and the effects of the Protest Paradigm, which is believed to have the most relevance to the study of how news coverage influenced or affected

members of the public's attitudes towards a racialized protest movement. The second purpose of this literature review is to assess and outline earlier studies with similar focal points on racialized protests, language, and framing, in order to help in both defining and expanding those fundamental concepts. Specifically, themes such as news biases, language structure in the news, and the impact of news on public engagement, are addressed as past researchers also found them relevant to the research topic.

The news industry routinely holds "significant influence on our perceptions of what are the most salient issues of the day" (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p.1). This concept is referred to as agenda setting, in which journalists' focus the public's attention to specific issues facing our country and local communities, which then influences what the public finds most important (Campbell, 2014). Arguably, this is one of, if not the most crucial stages of news reporting, followed by the framing of that news in which how a news report is prepared or laid out is additionally very impactful. It is this connection between what journalists report on, and then how they report on that particular issue that can shape the public's attention, thoughts, and perhaps even their actions. For example, the frame around a picture can affect the way the image itself is interpreted or received by viewers, so it is artistically valuable to choose a suitable frame; likewise, journalists have a similarly necessary process (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009).

The news media has become an essential component in the depiction of racially charged protests, held by social movement groups like BLM, as the industry plays a critical role in conveying the importance of an issue to the public. While news media professionals may attempt to remain unbiased, how a story is reported on can affect the audience reading it. The main theoretical framework for this research is based on Framing theory. Linguistic concepts such as racial stereotyping, intergroup identification, are all believed to be interconnected with Framing

theory, and prove to be helpful in the critical examination of the effects of news coverage on public discourse. The first section of this research reviews relevant literature which explores racial discrimination in the news and pays close attention to racial stereotypes in particular. The second section focuses on exploring the history of framing theory, including types of media frames, and the protest paradigm. The third and final section applies framing theory specifically to protests and social movements and reviews how issues of framed news coverage and group identification affect the public's emotional response and or call-to-action.

Language in the News

It is typically the standard for news articles to report in a principally indirect and impartial method, reporting on “series of events, background, consequences, and reactions that make up the main news event of the report” (Teo, 2000, p.11). However, this is not often entirely accomplished as writers have opinions and judgments, making it hard sometimes to distinguish fact from opinion. Teo (2000) notates this distinction as the reporting of events, “Events,” and the evaluating of events or “Evaluative Events.” The latter focuses on reporting the “meaning behind the facts,” whereas the former lays out the facts (Teo, 2000). This, in part, is due to the ‘Thematization’ element of the “Textual Metafunction” of language, “which works to create a discourse that is structured or organized” (Dvorak, 2008, p.18). For this research, the importance of thematization in the news lay in the organization of information in both typical and atypical ways which can indicate the weight a journalist wants to give it (Teo, 2000). Therefore, by investigating how information is organized, researchers can look at any potential ideological meanings hidden inside a news article (Teo, 2000).

Racialized Language in the News. While Teo's (2000) study explores how racist ideology is often embedded within the structure of journalist's news reports, there are many other forms of discourse which marginalize racial groups. One such way, is with the preservation of stereotypical beliefs which only reinforce discrimination by "systematically influencing perceptions, interpretations, judgments... and justifying disparities between groups" (Dovidio, J. F., Hewstone, M., Glick, P., & Esses, V. M., 2010, p.25). Group membership affects how people perceive others socially as inside or outside their groups (Foreman, K., Arteaga, C., & Collins, A., 2016). The notation of difference between groups plays into the continuation of identification biases, which generally refers to the evaluation of one's own racial or social "group" (ingroup) as more favorable than others one does not ascribe to (outgroup) (Dovidio et al., 2010). When the social categorization between ingroup-outgroup membership is made prominent, as opposed to the recognition of individual identities, people are less trusting of other groups (Dovitio et al., 2010; Insko, C. A., Schopler, J., Gaertner, L., Wildschut, T., Kozar, R., Pinter, B., Montoya, M. R., 2001). The process of social categorization affords a foundation for social biases to develop and linger as part of socialization and can further influence the degree to which discrimination is created and expressed (Dovitio et al., 2010; Sherif, 1966).

Turner & Oakes (1986) Social Identity Theory explores how group identity makes up a significant portion of a person's self-concept and is contingent on which group they identify with, and as more important. To this point, when a person's group identification is strong, they become more protective of both the interest and social standing of the group (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). A central facet of social identity theory relates back to media, and the effects of outgroup members being portrayed negatively, which can then trigger ingroup members to accept these representations as "prototypes" (Foreman et al, 2016). Consequently, media has the ability to

influence opinions about group membership, influence how out-groups are treated, define social status and standing of groups, and finally normalize these as generally accepted viewpoints (McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014). This past research reinforces the notion that group membership points to how people make sense of media and how they will understand messages concerning the groups they identify with and the groups they do not.

Regarding race relations and the preservation of social biases, discrimination and prejudice function as defensive reactions to the challenging of the sense of dominant group position (Blumer, 1958a, p.5, as cited in Dovidio et al., 2010). Social biases like stereotypes and group membership are often communicated through media, news specifically, and affect how people process and understand information regarding others (Dovidio et al., 2010). The presence of those biases in the news is then further impacted by the use of “racial grammar” (Bonilla-Silva, 2011) and “racial indexing” (Dana-Ain Davis, 2007). Racial grammar within news reporting was established as dialogue which brought race into the framework of thought at any time (Bonilla-Silva’s, 2011). Racial grammar in news dialogue, is “the assumption of whiteness” when a person speaks, whereas persons of color are ‘named’ and transcribed in exact speech, which helps to indicate their race (Bonilla-Silva, 2011, p. 190). The concept can be further illustrated by the differences in how reporting on universal issues, like school shootings are treated in news coverage, where shootings at Black schools are loaded with narratives of potential drug involvement or missing parents, despite having lower or similar statistics for both (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). Dana-Ain Davis’ (2007) notion of racial indexing, examines how news outlets use “code words” and are “implicitly racially disparaging”. This allows journalists to speak about race and racial issues without being outwardly or “explicitly” racist, exemplified by using language such as ‘thug’ (Banks, 2018).

Framing Theory

Researcher and anthropologist Gregory Bateson first defined the concept of framing as the “spatial and temporary bonding of a set of interactive messages” (Bateson, 1972, p. 197, as cited in Arowolo, 2017). However, most attribute the concept of framing to Erving Goffman’s research on frame analysis stemming from his book: “Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience” (Goffman, 1974). Goffman examined frames as an arrangement of “concepts and theoretical perspectives,” which help to organize experiences, as well as influence the actions and thought processes of individuals (Goffman, 1974). Frames simplify the world by “selectively emphasizing” and “encoding objects, experiences, events, and situations” (Snow & Benford, 1988). According to Goffman (1974), people interpret everything immediately around themselves through a central framework, which mostly goes unnoticed by them. Following this notion, media and communication scholars often subscribe to the idea that basic human communication is built on the application of frames based on one’s understanding of the world, ultimately making framing “unavoidable” (Seligman, 2016).

Researcher Robert Entman (1993), defined framing as the process of picking “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or, treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). The concept of framing derives from the “constructionist paradigm,” stemming from the belief that “meanings are not assigned automatically to objects, events or circumstances, but are the result of socially mediated interpretive processes” (Ciurel, 2018, p.7). In other words, framing is the process of communicating in a way which “defines problems, diagnoses cause, makes moral judgments, and suggests remedies” (Kuypers, 2009, p. 182). Most media and communication scholars agree

that framing theory implies how information is given to the public, known as the frame, impacts how people then choose to process said information. In other words, frames are concepts which work to consolidate and then denote meaning within a message. They are produced “by introducing news items with predefined and narrow contextualization” (Arowolo, 2017, p. 1).

News and media industries most frequently rely on frames concerning how they convey information (Arowolo, 2017), which either increases the audience’s understanding or are journalistic shortcuts that give stories greater meaning. As David Scheufele (2000) explored, this means that “frames influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts, and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame” (Nelson et al., 1997, as cited in Scheufele, 2000, p. 19). Media studies scholar and journalist Walter Lippmann (1921) presented the theory that media constructs “a simple frame(work) through which the audience can more easily interpret events” (Coombs, 2015, n.p). Subsequently, it was understood that frame analysis is an “approach which shows how people understand activities or situations” (Dejica, 2010, p.121).

In his article “Frame Analysis,” Goffman (1974), suggested that people understand their world around themselves through an initial framework, which is not noticed by the individual.

Goffman proposed two differences within the primary frameworks (natural and social), both of which help people to understand information, and have a functional distinction between the two (1974). The first of which, natural frameworks, recognizes “events as physical occurrences taking natural quote literally and not attributing any social forces to the causation of events” (Davie, 2014). The latter, social frameworks, “view events as socially driven occurrences, due to the whims, goals, and manipulations on the part of other social players” (Arowolo, 2017). Goffman’s view on this is that whether aware or intentional or not, people use

these frameworks or “frames” in communication daily (Davie, 2014). According to Fairhurst & Sarr (1996), framing is comprised of three core components; “language, thought, and forethought”. Deetz, Tracy & Simpson (2000) further explain the functions of the three components:

“Language helps us to remember information and acts to transform the way in which we view situations... People must have thought and reflected on their own interpretive frameworks and those of others. One must have the forethought to predict framing opportunities”.

Constructing Frames. Constructing frames for news articles is regularly a conscious decision by news reporters, journalists, editors, and or news executives. This effectively makes them “gatekeepers” that consciously pick, “organize and present the ideas, events, and topics they cover” (Davie, 2014). “Media framing” is the manner in which the news is shaped, particularly how news stories are organized (Littlejohn, 2011). “Headings, pictures, videos, descriptions, and the order of events” are some of the elements of news coverage, that influence the stories reception by audiences (Rhee, 1997).

Fridkin, Wintersieck, Courey, and Thompson (2017), demonstrated that when analyzing the framing of news coverage for a violent altercation between a police officer and a Black female college professor. Their research examines how frames applied when introducing the altercation, affected the public’s support of the professor or police officer. Elements of the news report were presented, showing the study ultimately found that exposure to a “law and order” frame and a “police brutality frame” significantly affected the public’s evaluations of the police officer, and support (Fridkin et al., 2017). The study additionally found that the events framing, influenced “perceptions of racism in policing as a problem in their community” (Fridkin et al., 2017).

In the context of social movements, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) have focused on frames as “interpretative packages.” These packages consist of rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, visual images, and symbols (Gamson et al., 1989), which is consistent with Gail Fairhurst and Robert Sarr’s, “The Art of Framing,” (1996). Fairhurst et al., established seven methods that news media professionals utilize to frame the news including: “the use of metaphors, stories (narration), tradition, jargon, artifacts, contrast, and spin” (1996). Metaphors frame abstract ideas through comparisons; stories use narrative to frame topics in memorable ways; traditions are the cultural customs that carry significance (Fairhurst et al., 1996). Artifacts are objects with “intrinsic symbolic value,” slogans, jargon, and catchphrases frame objects with a memorable expression (Fairhurst et al., 1996). Finally, contrast is used to describing what an object is not, and spin presents a judgment (positive or negative) about a concept that was not initially “immediately obvious” (Fairhurst et al., 1996).

In “Framing US Coverage of International News...” (1991), Entman explains that:

“Unless the narratives are compared, frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably, because many of the framing devices can appear as “natural,” unremarkable choices of words or images, (p. 6).

Consequently, frames are not always straightforward or immediately apparent, nor are the decisions that go into their use “inevitable or unproblematic” (Entman, 1991). To compare frames, which helps to determine “interpretation of events,” Entman (1991) established five common frame types: Conflict, Human Interest/Personalization, Consequence, Morality, and Responsibility. When framing news articles, the media uses Conflict, to prioritize the struggles between groups rather than focusing on the actual problems or decisions. Human Interest/Personalization is used to attach a person or their personality to a story rather than focus on more critical parts of a story. The consequence is then used to speak to the impact of either a

policy or a problem rather than the problem itself. Morality calls into question if one is acting ethically. Finally, responsibility for a “cause or solution” is assigned to a party or a person (Entman, 1991).

Race and Framing. When it comes to BLM and protests surrounding injustice, it becomes imperative we are aware of, and understand the function media plays when it comes to the conversations and attitudes we have about race. Viewers of the news, and other forms of media, are constantly inundated with judgements about different racial groups which help to “create, enforce, and reproduce stereotypes and racial ideologies” (Abraham & Appiah, 2006; as cited in Foreman et, al, 2016). When the news media frames stories particularly regarding race, harmfully, it helps to maintain negative and biased stereotypes, which viewers will rely on as trustworthy information concerning that group of people (Abraham & Appiah, 2006). For example, how media frame race and images of Black Americans may explain why negative stereotypes are so regularly associated with Black peoples. When news media pairs images of Blacks with stereotypical depictions related to topics like unemployment, poverty, drugs, crime, and violence (Entman, 1994; Martindale, 1996; Gilens, 1996; Bird, 1996), effectively helps to trigger racial attitudes in viewers (Appiah, 2001, 2002). With the construction and reproduction of these racially prejudiced stereotypes, “biased information inevitably becomes incorporated into ‘common knowledge’ or schemata that viewers form about stereotyped groups” (Ramasubramanian, 2007, p. 251). When presented in a news context, these negative stereotypical narratives can have particularly long-lasting effects (Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996), such as influencing perceptions, judgments, behaviors (Arendt, 2013), and “real-world interactions with members from these groups” (Mastro, 2003).

Framing of Protests/ Social Movements

How the news industry covers protests/ social movements has been the emphasis of a significant amount of research for the past several decades. As news outlets are many people's primary source of information about the world around them, it may impact the formation of public acceptance or rejection of the information they consume (Gitlin, 2003). Framing theory is especially beneficial when examining or studying protests or social movements because it "accounts for symbolic processes of collective action mobilization" (Ciurel, 2018). The focal point of past research on framing protests focuses on marginalization devices journalists and other media professionals used when covering stories of protests which "delegitimize social protests" (Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1998.) According to Snow and Benford (2000), protest groups face three specific challenges such as (1) "counter-framing by movement opponents, bystanders, and the media; (2) frame disputes within movements; and (3) the dialectic between frames and events".

Banks (2018) examines linguistic strategies within news framing which serves to delegitimize protest and protest groups, and "discipline black activist" such as BLM. Banks (2018), argues that particular types of terminologies are used when describing Black or white people/ groups; and such, these distinctive frames can be racist. While not the explicit intent of the media, discourse, which includes racial grammar and or racial indexing is easily identifiable by readers and taps into racialized schemas (Banks, 2018). Black peoples and other non-white peoples have historically been devalued in American news media (Bjornstrom, E. E., Kaufman, R. L., Peterson, R. D., & Slater, M. D., 2010), the racial grammar and indexing within news frames allow journalists to both indicate and discriminate based on race without ever mentioning it (Banks, 2018). The three main framing strategies they utilize are: "deployment of public

memory, utilizing rules of decorum, and the maintenance of post-racial discourse” (Banks, 2018). This study examines the first two concepts, as they best directly relate to the research questions.

BLM vs. Civil Rights Movement. Hooker (2016), highlights one theme which consistently appears in news discourse, to critique modern-day protest groups like BLM, is the comparison to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s Civil rights movement in the 1960s. Criticism of BLM is often notated in the comparison of protest styles, as the civil rights protest have consistently be classified as ‘peaceful protests’ (Hooker, 2016). Banks (2018) defines this comparison as “deployment of public memory,” in that the notation of peace for past movements, insinuates that the opposite is true of current protest groups. Within news outlets framing of social protests, the Civil Rights Movement, which was explicitly non- violent, has been exclusively credited with social change.

Meanwhile, other civil rights groups, such as the Black Panthers, have consistently been discredited as “violent” or called “thugs,” despite also having to fight for racial equality (Hooker, 2016). While news outlets frame articles using words like “hero” and “famously” to speak of Dr. King and his actions, Bank’s importantly notes, that despite encouraging peaceful protests, protesters were often met with extreme brutality at the hand or police and white civilians (2018). Contrastingly, the frames employed for BLM, who campaigns against systematic racism and the brutality of Black bodies (Black Lives Matter, 2013), used racial grammar such as ‘forceful’ and ‘radical’ to describe the movement (Banks, 2018). Framing the current BLM and other racialized protests in this manner is subtle but have negative implications, which readers understand both consciously and subconsciously and end up associating with the protest movement (Banks,

2018). Ultimately, this discourse shifts the reader's focus and may harm either their understanding of the protested cause or their sympathy.

Bad Protesters. The second framing strategy in news reports which Banks (2018) found disparaging to protest groups such as BLM, was “utilizing rules of decorum” (2018). In short, decorum represents the social codes which “reiterate cultural norms of stranger sociability” (Banks, 2018). Those who appear non-conformative are evaluated as being “unfit for citizenship and public participation” (Deem 2002; as cited in Banks, 2018). Protest groups that attempt to bring attention to inequality are regularly silenced by news media structures of decorum (Lozano-Reich, 2009; as cited in Banks, 2018), which promote the ideology of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Black peoples/ protesters (Banks, 2018). The focus on ‘bad’ protesters was examined explicitly concerning the 2015 the death of Freddie Gray (Banks, 2018). News outlets initially called the protests “peaceful,” but after a small minority began to riot (Babcock, 2015; Banks, 2018), changed their narratives and began calling the protesters “thugs” and delegitimizing their cause (Yan, H., and D. Ford. 2015). Whether intentional or not, news media outlets and news journalists frame racialized protests in ways which construct anti-Black protester discourse and take away from the protest cause (Banks, 2018).

The Protest Paradigm. Several common characteristics of news articles when reporting on protests is to utilize news frames, quotes by official sources, an invocation of public opinion, delegitimization, and demonization, is otherwise known as the “Protest Paradigm” (McLeod, 2007). A near monopoly on the dissemination of information is problematic for protest groups like BLM, as it can lead to distorted portrayals of the issues behind the protests (Chan, J. M., & Lee, C. C., 1984). The distortion of information caused by paradigms has all been noted to “marginalize groups which challenge prevailing power structures” (Gitlin, 1981: Shoemaker,

1984; as cited in McLeod et al., 1992, p. 259). As a result of these reporting pitfalls, which fail to reflect on, or understand the issues behind the protests, audiences often report negative feelings towards the protesters, a lack of awareness about, and sympathy for the social issue that prompted the protest (Leopold et al, 2017; Boyle et al, 2012; McLeod, 1995, 2007).

Past research, which examines the relationship between the news media and protest groups, finds “most protest groups operate with limited resources and have a difficult time securing public visibility, disseminating information, and exerting influence” (McLeod, 2007, p.21). To further their cause, and implement actual political change, the BLM movement relies heavily on both their online social presence, as well as maintaining visibility within the traditional press news cycles. However, the latter form of social visibility may come with a substantial cost. The importance of BLM’s cause to news viewers/ readers is lost because of the protest paradigm which dilutes understanding of the movement by using ‘negative words’ such as “looters” and “thugs” (Rickford, 2015). According to Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, and Augustyn (2001), these description biases focus on “featuring arrests, violence, and counter-demonstrators, generating episodic coverage and focusing on the protest events instead of the underlying issues” (Lee, 2014).

The protest paradigm focuses on news stories that pay “significant attention to the appearance and behaviors of protesters” (McLeon, 2007), which aims to draw attention to their “deviance from social norms” and may isolate them as a minority (McLeon, 2007). This issue is furthered inflamed by the use of generalizations of ‘public opinion’ typically from the perspective of a quoted official, whose institution may be being protested, or a bystander who is not participating in the protest (Amenta et al., 2017). While research has shown that the protest paradigm disparages protest groups, there is less literature focusing on how that translates into

social commentary, and what specific reasoning is given in that commentary, that either accepts or rejects a protest, directly due to the news article which features elements of the protest paradigm.

Protester Response. Social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Take a Knee, Me Too, or Occupy Wall Street, have been defined as “purposeful, organized groups striving to work toward a common goal” (Little. W., & McGivern, R., 2012, n.p). Social movements: “frame or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 1988: 198). Social movements, as explained by researchers Porta & Diani, have three characteristics: “they involve political or cultural conflicts and have specifically identified opponents; they are connected through dense informal groups and networks, and they are orientated towards developing and sharing distinct collective identities” (2006: 20). As social movements only exist in cultures where differences regarding aspects of reality are common and are intended to breed social change by either: (1) trying to create change, (2) trying to oppose change, or (3) trying to give a voice to those marginalized (Little. W., & McGivern, R., 2012). While social movements utilize different types of action, including protests, this research recognizes the terms are often socially used interchangeably.

Framing Effects on the Public

Fridkin, Wintersieck, Courey, and Thompson (2017), specifically examined how media framing influenced readers sensitivity towards racism within law enforcement, the use of force by a police officer, and then how that affected attitudes toward the police officer, the suspect, and their overall impressions of the event (Fridkin et al., 2017). The study examined the framing of news coverage for a violent altercation between a police officer and a Black female college

professor. The researchers found that the media highlighted a police brutality theme most frequently, but found other issues discussed in the story's news reporting as well. The research examined how the frames applied when introducing the altercation, affected the public's support of the professor or police officer. Ultimately, the study found that exposure to the "law and order" frame and the "police brutality frame" significantly affected the public's evaluations of the police officer (Fridkin et al., 2017). The study additionally found unintended evidence that the events framing, influenced "perceptions of racism in policing as a problem in their community" (Fridkin et al., 2017).

Frames can be hidden or noticeable (Hellsten, I., Dawson, J., & Leydesdorff, L., 2010), to which previous research has focused on how differing frames may affect the attitudes, understanding, or behavior (political), of news readers. Cognitive psychologists Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins (1988) assert that "when frames are made more accessible by frequent use, these frames are more likely to be utilized to process information" (p.599). This is further impacted by the linguistic choices, and inadvertent biases, of reporters which emerge within news frames. Gun Semin and Klaus Fiedler's (1991) Linguistic Category Model (LCM) explains linguistic biases, such as language abstraction, which describes:

The same event or behavior... on different levels of abstractness ranging from descriptive action verbs (e.g., kick), which are most concrete, via interpretive action verbs (e.g., attack), state verbs (e.g., hate) to the most abstract category, adjectives (e.g., aggressive) (as cited in Vaes et al., 2019) (p. 81).

Anne Maass, (1999) further explored this notion by developing Linguistic Intergroup Bias (LIB) concept, which states that positive ingroup behaviors and negative outgroup behaviors are described more abstractly for members of the opposite group. Consequently, media coverage in which a specific frame or narration dominates, or frequent exposure to said frame, will make it

more readily accessible which increases the impact of the frame on viewers processing of the information (Druckman, J. N., & Bolsen, T., 2011).

Kinder and Sanders (1996) explained the duality within the practice of framing, stating, “frames are interpretive structures embedded in (political) discourse... At the same time, frames also live inside the mind; (as) cognitive structures that help individual citizens make sense of the issues” (p. 164). Researchers across a range of social science fields have recognized that there are societal effects of media framing. However, it is not agreed upon whether the effects of framing are a reactionary process (Entman, 1993) or dependent on a circumstance such as; audiences preexisting biases, knowledge, opposing media frames, and or source credibility (Druckman, 2004, Druckman et al., 2011). Media research has proposed that a person’s previously established knowledge or opinions about an issue, can ultimately affect their sensitivity to or acceptance/ rejection of a media frame.

Sherif & Sherif’s (1967) work specifically with Social Judgment Theory, recognized that people could and do understand the same piece of news differently, and it is essential to note that will affect the impact and their evaluation of the same frame. According to researchers Su, Liu, and McLeod (2019), when forming opinions about the information one is exposed to, such as that found in a news article, readers will trust their own “mental anchors” to measure the legitimacy of what they are reading. The first anchor is the readers existing feelings and opinions on the issue being covered, like racially charged protests for example. This is in part because ideologically-aligned frames are regularly considered either “more important, more believable, more influential, and less biased” (Su, M., Liu, J., & Mcleod, D. M., 2019). This is attributed to the fact that people shape their social judgments, alongside their preexisting “judgmental

anchors” such as political association. This then determines in what way messages will be both applicable to the person, as well as how it will be “encoded and evaluated” (Su et al., 2019).

Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall (1981) found that when a communicated frame is within a person’s realm of acceptance or contains existing beliefs, the information is processed positively. This can lead to the acceptance of the judgments that appear in the article in which the frame was initially communicated is more in line with their personal opinion that it actually may be (Sherif et al., 1981). In contrast, if a communicated frame is outside of a person’s realm of acceptance, or counters existing beliefs, the difference between the person’s opinions will be compared and amplified. This leads to the reader’s rejection of the article and the feeling that the message is more opposing with personal opinion, than it actually may be (Sherif et al., 1981).

This research attempts to analyze the substantive content, use of language, frames and or paradigms within news articles reporting on the Trayvon Martin protests. In doing this, this research seeks to help build the literature surrounding how reporting styles and or practices, may influence public acceptance and or rejection of racially charged protest. In order to research how public opinion was, or was not, affected by news biases, the research analyzed narratives expressed in both news articles, as well as their corresponding comment sections. In particular, governing agencies, which have drawn significant public scrutiny, may bias their news reports. Whether consciously done or not, everything from a journalists’ choice of words, to their use of direct quotes, has an effect on readers acceptance or rejection of racially charged social protests, based on their feelings of empathy and connection to the issue (Page, 2017). In order to analyze this issue concerning the Trayvon Martin case and the subsequent media coverage, the following research questions were examined:

RQ1: What news biases appear across news platforms when reporting on racially charged protests, and how do those biases vary?

RQ2: How does public opinion, expressed through online public comment sections, vary based on the way news articles frame stories regarding racially charged protests?

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter will provide an overview of the research methods utilized for this study. It presents information on the analyzed news articles and the reasons for their inclusion in the study. Information on comment selection from the news articles corresponding comment sections is additionally provided, as well as an explanation of how the comments were sampled. An explanation of the research design selected for this study is provided, which includes reasoning for the choice. This chapter also discusses data collection, the procedures followed in conducting the study, and the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, the ethical issues that may have unintentionally biased this research due to personal beliefs and position in the world were also discussed.

In the realm of social science, the term “methodology” signifies to how we “approach problems and seek answers” (Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. L., 2015, p. 13). Several methods of analysis can be used in qualitative research, such as, “phenomenology, hermeneutics, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenographic and content analysis” (Burnard, 1995, as cited in Bengtsson, 2016, p. 11). According to Kitzinger (2007), qualitative, quantitative, or a mixed-methods research design are useful tools for identifying frames. However, qualitative research studies are often utilized to “attempt to understand the relationships that exist within media and

society” (Brennen, 2013). With this understanding, a two-part qualitative textual analysis was employed to address the research questions.

Textual analysis, much like it sounds, is a type of qualitative research method, which focuses on language, both how it is used, and how we then construct meaning from it (Brennen, 2013). Brennen explicates this point by looking to cultural theorist Raymond Williams’ suggestion that through language, we can shape our social realities (Brennen, 2013; Williams, 1977). The “text” in the term textual analysis, is used to describe more than words or written documents, but all things symbolic in meaning from which perspective and understanding of society can be drawn (Brennen, 2013). The purpose of conducting a textual analysis study is to understand better and to be able to label the “content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts” (Bainbridge, 2008). “Texts” therefore, could include anything from video games, newspapers, fashion, to advertisements. However, this research understood “text” to be the analyzed news articles and subsequent comment sections and focused on examining the words within them, due to the different meaning and connotations behind them and their use, regardless of how slight or vast their actual appearance differed. With this respect, “the word ‘text’ has post-structuralist implications” (McKee, 2003), surrounding the construction of meaning. Thus, it was understood that the words within the texts had more than “a single purpose, meaning, or existence... and individual readers... created new and individual purposes, meanings, and existences for (the) given text” (New World Encyclopedia, 2015, n.p.).

Textual analysis was principally developed from the work of Roland Barthes (1915–80) who was among the theorists recognized in the 1960s as a “French structuralist” (Bainbridge, 2008). It was Barthes belief that researchers could ‘decode’ any cultural product, specifically within pop culture, by analyzing the ‘signs’ within the said text. Two common categories of texts

are (1) Transcripts of communication (recordings), and (2) Outputs of communication (messages from communicators), the latter of which is more accessible accessed (Bainbridge, 2008).

Textual analysis is a crucial tool of communication researchers in understanding how meaning is created from media texts, both simple (advertisements), to more complex forms (news narratives) (Bainbridge, 2008). Textual analysis proved to be the most appropriate method of analysis for this research for several reasons. The first is that with 'textual analysis' researchers can "attempt to understand the likely interpretations of texts made by people who consume them" (McKee, 2003, p. 1-2), the second was that it allowed for the examination of "sense-making practices" (McKee, 2003). The third and most crucial reasoning for the use of textual analysis was that it helped to provide a system which allowed examination of how similar or dissimilar said sense-making practices are, specifically in relation to media texts (McKee, 2003).

The first textual analysis for this research was conducted from online news reports about protests held after the final verdict concerning the Trayvon Martin case. A second textual analysis was conducted of the same news articles corresponding comment sections, in an analysis process separate from, and without consideration of the news sites. The articles and their subsequent comment sections were analyzed separately during the first round of coding, from which all relevant text was coded. Critical reasons for using multiple textual analyses in this research was to determine if any stimuli, universal themes, or thought processes could be identified between news reports, and additionally found in the sentiments expressed by their commenters. The researcher believed that in doing multiple analyses, first with news and comments separated, and then again once combining the data, that themes found in the comment sections could be recognized, or not, as influenced by the themes found in the news articles.

Critical Discourse Analysis

For this research Norman Fairclough's, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1995) was utilized in order to examine language and description biases, as well as look for adherence to the protest paradigm, and any other reoccurring thematic traits for the initial textual analysis of the news reports. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) concerns the study and analysis of both written and spoken texts, in order to reveal "discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias" (Van Dijk, 2006). CDA analyzes how said sources are both preserved and propagated inside specific social, political, and historical contexts (Van Dijk, 1998). CDA was made famous by Norman Fairclough (1995), whose structure for examining discourse made up three distinct forms of analysis. These consisted of (1) the analysis of language, which could include either written or spoken texts. (2) Analysis of discourse practice, which was defined by the activity of engaging with the text in some form of either creation, circulation, or utilization; and finally (3) discourse analyzation, which studies "the effect of power dynamics, and how those dynamics can affect those involved in those dynamics" (Fairclough, 1995).

CDA recognizes discourse, the use of language and power, as social constructs and inseparable concepts (Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2006). CDA looks to understand and create a dialogue about the power afforded to specific subsets of society, and the abuse of that power. In discourse, there is often a discussion about the elites in a political sense, but CDA looks to examine and eventually take an oppositional stance to said power structures. CDA highlights the rhetoric within various forms of speech, which serves to emphasize both "the social and political" (Dijk, 1995), aspects of life. This research will look to examine discourse used in the news, and how language affects readers, or the public's, immediate response. The relationship between societal power and language, or "linguistic manifestations" are central focuses for CDA based

research (Fairclough, 1989/1991; Wodak, 1989). Discourse is formed and maintained by power relations, critical analysis, or critique, and frequently aims to reveal said structures of power, as well as to unmask the ideologies behind said structure (Fairclough, 1995). Researcher Ruth Wodak defines CDA as; “an interdisciplinary approach to language study with a critical point of view” to study “language behavior in natural speech situations of social relevance,” (2000).

A prime objective of CDA is to expose the hidden “ideological assumptions” within the language of a written text (Fairclough, 1989). McGregor (2004) notes that a text both communicates and stages “facts and beliefs,” construction of identity for those discussed, and frames for their message. CDA notes that language choice is intentional, whether or not we are aware that the way we write, and what we write is intended to have a specific impact (McGregor, 2004; Sheyholislami, 2001). While on the surface texts may not appear to be biased, they can create depictions of other groups, people, and events with a specific slant for which CDA attempts to expose (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The portrayal and representation of specific social groups within news reporting can appear neutral while being prejudiced in nature due to systematic issues like race, gender, class, age, or religion (McGregor, 2004). CDA is especially useful in its intervention of the normalization of inequality and injustice that specific groups have continually faced within the unbalanced power relations of news discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

A vital component of discourse analysis for this research is that CDA assists in the outlining of power relations. Power, a central concept for CDA, often analyses the use of language by those in power which are often responsible for the existence of inequalities. Within many societies, the dynamics of power, which can lead to the control of action and or behavior, often go undetected. While this power is not an exact derivative of language, distributions of

power can be altered both in the short and the long term through the use of specific language (Wodak & Meyers, 2016). Whether intended or not, the choices behind the words we use are politized, and as a result, they tend to reflect both the power and interests of the writer (McGregor, 2004).

CDA is an indispensable tool for understanding, examining, and criticizing said, “social life” reflected within a text (Luke, 1997), as it connects the “use of language and the exercise of power” (Thompson, 2002). CDA is useful to this particular study because it helps highlight “signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxta-positioning, their sequencing, their layout” (Janks, 1997). Moreover, CDA allows researchers to continuously analyze, reanalyze, and challenge power relations such as “oppression, repression, marginalization, and dominance” (McGregor, 2004). This research first utilized CDA to analyze the language used in news articles critically, and second, to determine how that language affected the readers, or the public’s, immediate responses. Close attention was paid to any metaphors, rhetoric, and linguistic choices (Deacon et al., 1999) which were then used for analysis.

Data Collection

News Articles. The data analyzed for this research was collected from three online news websites, which covered the protests related to the acquittal of Zimmerman, and whose websites allowed access to the comment sections. Each article analyzed had a publication date which ranged between July 18- 21, 2013, at which time “Justice for Trayvon,” and or “No Justice, No Peace” rallies were being held in protest of the “not guilty” verdict at the conclusion of the case. Variance in the dates is due to when the various news sources first reported protests surrounding the outcome of the case. The news websites chosen for this research were selected based on Pew Research study (See Appendix), which reported trust levels of news sources was determined by

ideological group (Mitchell et al., 2014). This scale was referenced to establish an equal representation of the primary ideologies of the public, with respect to the news site they choose for their news sources. Additionally, the scale was utilized to collect varied perspectives in the comment sections as “readers’ political ideology operates as the main judgment anchor which is affected by framing” (Su et al., 2018).

The news articles analyzed were from the following three websites: Washington Post (WaPo), published July 14, 2013, which is reported as being more trusted by Liberals, and more distrusted than trusted by Conservatives (Mitchell et al., 2014). Breitbart (BRBT), published July 19, 2013 which is reported as being more trusted by Conservatives and distrusted than trusted by Liberals (Mitchell et al., 2014). Lastly, The Guardian (GARD), published July 20, 2013 and is reported as being nearly as equally trusted as distrusted by both Liberals and Conservatives (Mitchell et al., 2014). Selection of news articles was determined by several factors, the first being the political ideology associated with each article’s typical readership. This was considered important for the research’s ability to provide a spectrum of perspectives within the comment sections, which could then be generalizable to the American public. A secondary criterion for the selection of the specific articles analyzed, was the ability to access the corresponding comment sections.

This research recognizes that news source selection is inherently political, as the basis for many people when selecting a new source, is often connected to how closely aligned it is with our pre-existing beliefs (Mitchell et al., 2016). To this point, the selection of the three news articles for this research aimed to include sources whose typical readership would reflect as complete a spectrum of political ideologies as possible. This was done in an effort to both mitigate potential researcher new source bias, as well as to attempt to sample a wider variety of

public opinion. Finally, the above-mentioned news articles were selected for analysis due to the focal points of their reporting being principally interested in both the protests and protesters of the case. These articles were additionally differentiated from news articles which mentioned the protests, but only secondarily, while reporting on the ongoing legal implications or possibilities for the case.

Comments. The data analyzed for the corresponding comment sections were collected by taking screenshots of all the comments, numbering the pictures based on the order the comments initially appeared online, creating pdf files of the pictures (named after their corresponding news article). The individual news articles and comment section pdfs were then uploaded into NVivo 12 data analysis software.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, news articles were uploaded into qualitative data software NVivo 12, which allows researchers to “work from a structured framework of codes” or by observing and the storing any emerging codes, they may discover while “reading and interpreting the data” (NVivo, 2018, n.p). In qualitative research, a “code” can be a word or short phrase allocated to a prominent “essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute” for pieces of visual or linguistic data (Saldana, 2016, p.4). In other words, codes are researcher-produced and specific constructs that represent or “decode” data (Vogt, Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2014, p.13). Once all rounds of coding were completed, a process of synthesizing was used to combine the data, and “consolidate meaning.” The data then took on “the symbolic form of a category, theme, concept, or assertion, or set in motion a new line of investigation, interpretive thought, or the crystallization of a new theory” (Saldana, 2014). Major themes of the research were the direct outcome of “coding, categorization, or analytic reflection” (Saldana, 2014, p. 54).

News Articles. Independent line by line coding was conducted for each news article, reoccurring themes and elements that stood out within the news reports were coded (Brennen, 2013). During the initial coding process, or “first round coding,” Elemental Methods, Descriptive Coding, (Saldana, 2014, p.97) was utilized to better understand the frameworks and construction of the news articles (Creswell, 2016). Descriptive coding has been widely utilized in qualitative inquiry because of its simplicity and usefulness to a wide variety of data types such as interview transcripts, journals, diaries, correspondence, and videos, and so on. (Saldana, 2014). The primary goal of Descriptive coding is to assist the reader make sense of what they saw or heard (Wolcott, 1994). This framework was selected in order to focus the research both on the storytelling language surrounding the events, as well as physical or “character” descriptors within the articles.

Comment Sections. Only original comments, related to the articles, were analyzed in order to control for opinions that would have been influenced only, or primarily, by elements present within the news articles rather than other commenter responses. All comments that met those standards were analyzed, resulting in a total of 132 comments from WaPo, 11 comments from BRBT, and 96 comments from GARD. Affective Methods, Values Coding, was utilized to understand the commenters “values, attitudes better, and beliefs representing his or her perspective or worldview” (Saldana, 2014, p. 131). The value represents the significance we give ourselves, other people, things, or ideas; it is the moral code humans live by (Daiute, 2014, p.69). An attitude is the feeling or thoughts we have about ourselves, other people, things, or ideas. Lastly, a belief is considered the “rules for action” (Stern & Porr, 2011, p.28). While beliefs combine both our values and attitudes with our “personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world” (Saldana, 2014).

Values coding was particularly appropriate for this study because it is best utilized when research is investigating “interview transcripts, blogs, vlogs, and other participant generated materials such as journals, diaries, and social media entries” (Saldana, 2014). The primary focus of this analysis was to understand both overt and underlying meanings within the text of the comment sections and in response to the news articles. An example of this are statements which contain the conjunctive word “but” which indicated contrasting attitudes (Bhatt, R., & Walkow, M., 2013), or ingroup/ outgroup identification of either Martin or Zimmerman, through designators like “they”, “them”, “us” or “we” (Giles, H. & Giles, J., 2013). Consistent with Daiute (2014), personal values such as those found in observed comment sections, were analyzed as either “major or minor, depending on the context” (p.86).

News Articles & Comment Sections.

Pattern coding was utilized for the second cycle coding methods, which helped to group initial and first-round findings into smaller “categories, themes, and concepts,” “as well as helped attribute meaning to them” (Brennen, 2013). The final coding processes for this research “code weaved” or analyzed all of the themes from the news articles in comparison to the themes from the comment sections in order to arrive at the final results. Any reoccurring themes present among all or a majority of the news articles that appeared to be related to the reoccurring themes of the comment sections were considered to be the studies significant findings and were reported and examined in the following results and discussion chapters.

Role of the Researcher

A critical component of qualitative research, for any chosen method, lay in the researcher’s self-reflection (Burnard, 1995). Some level of interpretation is required of all

qualitative research; however, the level of depth or abstraction depends on the capacity to which the researcher is able to detach him/herself (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2001). While exploring this research topic, which has “an explicit focus on race and culture” (Milner IV, 2007, p.388), it is essential to address both the perspectives, “pre-understanding” (Elo et al., 2014; Long & Johnson, 2000), and cultural background that guided and may have affected this research’s findings. As qualitative work necessitates a considerable amount of interpretation of data and reflection, and this research is influenced by my world views, perspective, and biases as a Black woman researching the impact news has on the viability of race-centered protest for the general public.

This research intended to understand what and how news frames of racially charged protest impact public opinion and support. However, as a Black woman, I am among the groups of people both directly affected by biased news reporting on the brutality of Black Americans, which results in protests, as well as emotionally impacted by said reports. While conducting this research over the course of a year, engaging with comments particularly those that “othered” Black America’s using pronouns like “they or them” was especially hard emotionally and mentally. Reader’s comments, which if spoken directly to me would be dismissed as racist and ignored, were particularly troubling to find deeper meaning when analyzing and coding content within the comment sections. With this as a consideration, my cultural background could have led to additional sensitivity to what appeared to be racial bias when coding, analyzing, and theming the data for this research.

Chapter 4- Results

This chapter will discuss the results from the research and reviews the studies significant findings as they pertained to both articles relationship with its comment section, and then generally as the article to comment section relationships were evaluated. Drawing on framing theory, this research looked to examine how various online news platforms framed their coverage of protests following the conclusion of the Trayvon Martin case, and how that affected reader's attitudes of the protests. A lack of research on the relationship between news frames and audience intentions, expressed in written thought, limited the ability to apply a pre-existing theoretical framework thoroughly. Consequently, this study investigated: acceptance or rejection of the actions of the protesters, determination of the importance of their cause, and types of biases or influence directly related to the differently framed news articles.

The tables below display the results of the content analyses of the three articles sources: 1) WAPO, 2) GARD, 3) BRBT. Table 4.1 shows the number of times, certain themes, as categorized by this researcher, appeared by news source. For GARD and WAPO, the top theme that emerged was remarks or comments made by official sources, which conveys the idea that the source was or is credible. The most frequent theme for BRBT, was that of protestor speech, which saw the article feature more direct speech from the protesters. Table 4.2 depicts the number of times comment themes were associated by the news source. The most frequent theme for both WAPO and BRBT was that of racial implications, that is, what the racial impact of the protests or court case was likely to be. The most frequent theme for GARD, had to do with the fairness of the judicial system.

Table 4.1

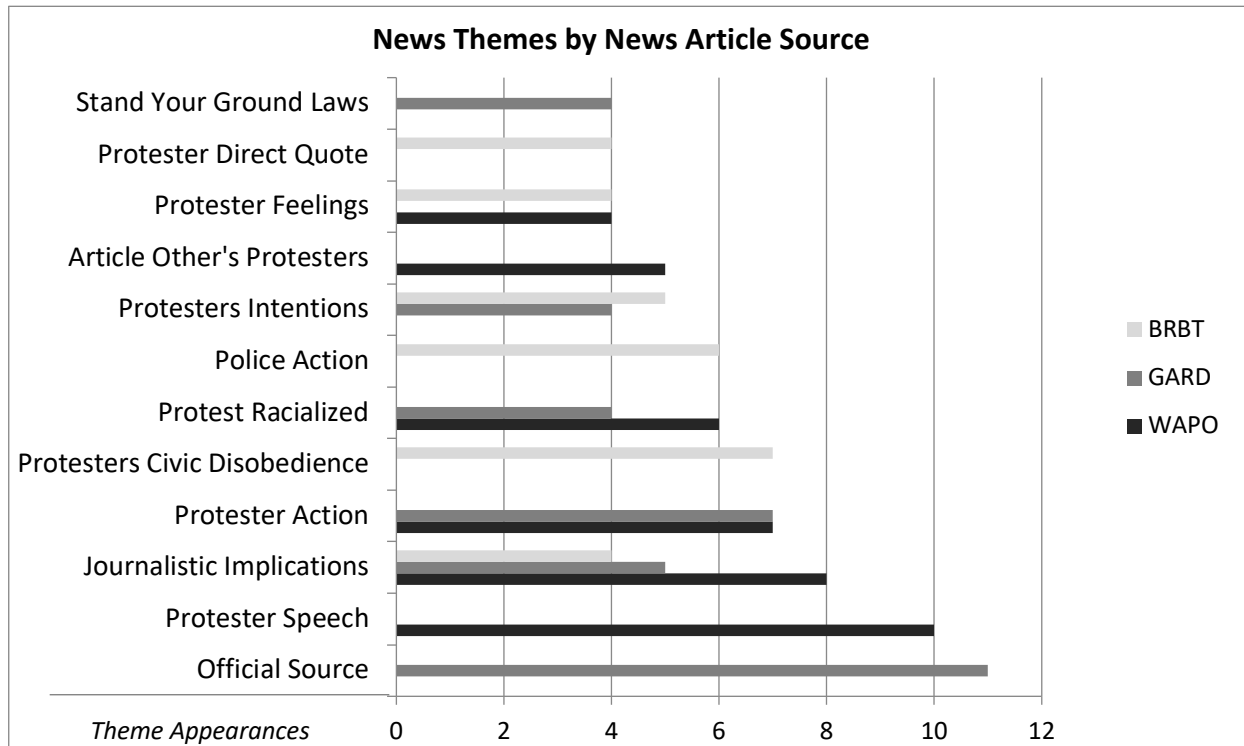
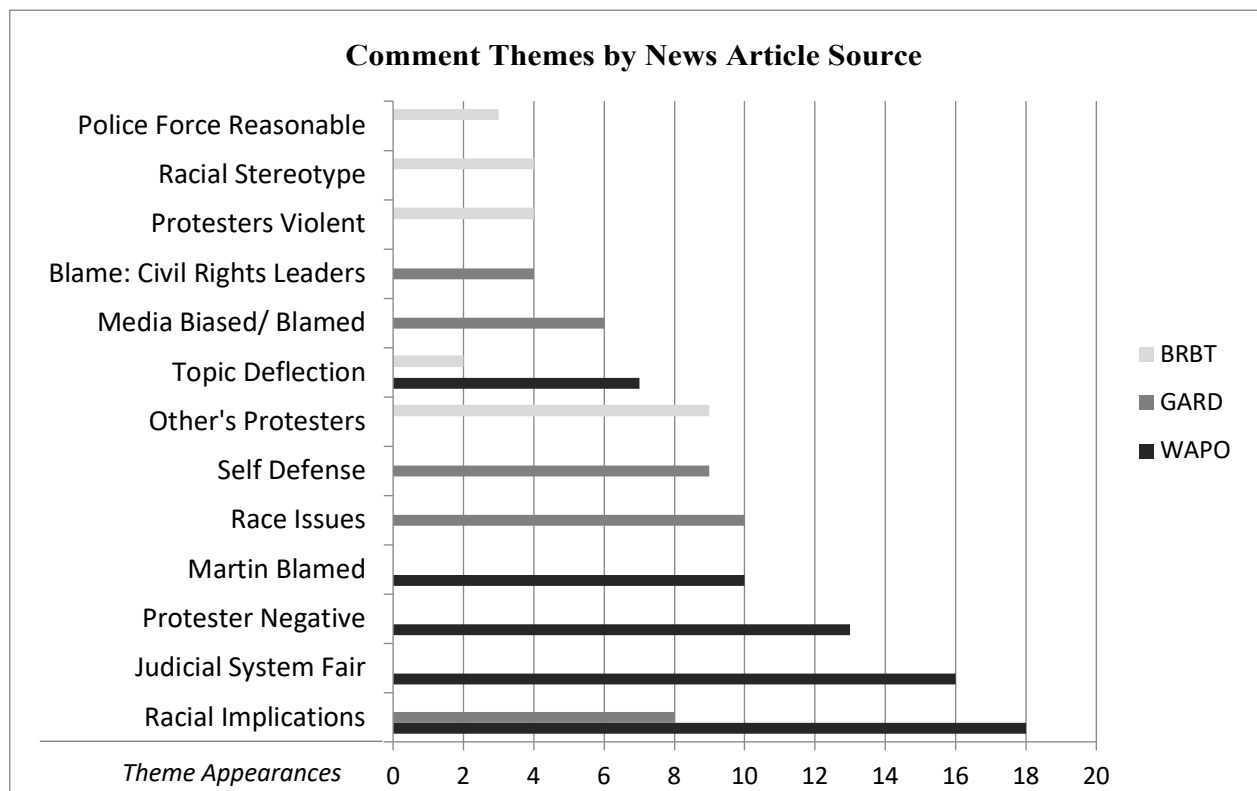


Table 4.2



News Biases

RQI asked what news biases appear across news platforms when reporting on racially charged protests, and how do those biases vary? As previously explored, news journalism is unintentionally impacted by the beliefs of the author writing it. In examining news bias, this study sought to determine the ways personal beliefs regarding racially charged protest would take shape. Analysis of the different news articles revealed several themes, including adherence to the protest paradigm, specifically in the form of implying of protester deviance, making inferences about race relations, and the protesters' civil disobedience. News bias was most significantly affected for all articles by the reporting of *Protester Deviance* (i.e. "one person was attacked by a protester..." (Breitbart, 2013)), which followed strict adherence to the protest paradigm. For both WAPO and GARD, this was indirectly exhibited in notations such as: "it appeared they caused little disruption" (Williams et al., 2013, n.p), and "...with no further outbreaks of the kind of violence that led to arrests in Los Angeles..." (Williams, 2013, n.p). The implication of such assertions played directly into the narrative that protesters are and can be socially deviant (McLeon, 2007), and focus on the potential for deviance, rather than the reason for the protest.

Next, in the news articles examined, both WAPO and GARD, notated that *Race Relations* played a factor in the case, and was a primary issue that prompted the protests (i.e. "amid ongoing anger over the acquittal of the man who shot dead the unarmed black teenager") (Williams, 2013, Williams et al., 2013). GARD additionally notated the protest as being "led by veteran civil rights leaders" (Williams et al., 2013, n.p). That notation in the article was consistent with Banks (2018) "deployment of public memory." BRBT focused on race relations nearly exclusively; however, the focus was redirected from the Martin case or verdict to the

racially tense relationship between protesters, and the police (i.e., “Police reported no provocation in the rock and bottle throwing. One police car was damaged, and a police horse was hit.” (Breitbart, 2013, n.p). These findings were all consistent with the protest paradigm.

Based on the examination of news articles covering Trayvon Martin protests, news bias could not concretely or be explicitly attributed to race or note how race exclusively may have impacted what was discovered. While it was determined that race was considered a factor in the reason for protesting, bias within the news articles was very significantly affected by the adherence to the protest paradigm, which can occur nonexclusively to matters of race such as in the Occupy Wall Street protests (Gottlieb, 2015).

Impact of Biased Language. All of the news articles notated that protests were either “peaceful protests... intended to be peaceful... or began peacefully” (William et al., 2013; Williams, 2013; Breitbart, 2013). However, the study found that all articles (WAPO, GARD, BRBT) incorporated linguistic biases consistent with LCM, and both the language used, and narrative choices of the journalists, such as the insinuation of public disturbance, undermined the efforts of the protestors. Words like “demanded” were used following the descriptions of protestors speech, despite actual quotes from protestors, such as: “when does it change... you can’t judge someone by a stereotype... I dress in baggy pants and Jordan’s; does that make me a thug?” (Williams et al., 2013). Quotes like these notated concern for personal wellbeing, and or questioned the lack of justice being experienced by the Black community, however, for the commenter’s words like “demanded” took the attention off of what was being expressed by the protestors and instead shifted attention to their possible behaviors. This was further demonstrated by the narration of protestors actions, which used descriptors such as: “pumping fists,” the notation that they “caused little disruption” (Williams et al., 2013), or threw “rocks and bricks at

cars” (Breitbart, 2013). When news reports used this type of abstract language to portray things that could or would be perceived as negative outgroup behaviors, as opposed to clear or concrete language, higher levels of prejudices were expressed toward outgroup members (Geschke, D., Sassenberg, K., Ruhrmann, G., & Sommer, D., 2010, as cited in Vaes, J., Latrofa, M., Suitner, C., & Arcuri, L., 2019). This led to the maintenance of racial stereotypes (Graf, S., Bilewicz, M., Finell, E., & Geschke, D., 2013), and ultimately undermined the reader/public’s ability to connect to the protesters or their protest reasoning.

Framing Variances

RQ2 asked how public opinion varied based on the way news articles frame stories, specifically regarding racially charged protests? Some news articles reported: 1) more Protester Action; such as their potential to disrupt the community in which the protest was held (following the protest paradigm), 2) reported less or no *Cause for Protest*; such as including background on Martin, and 3) less or no *Feelings of Protesters*, such as expressions of fear or sadness. This led to higher levels of the public’s acceptance of the judicial outcome of the trial, and lower levels of support for the protesters. Higher levels of the public’s acceptance of the judicial outcome were exemplified by remarks such as: “The justice system worked” (Williams, 2013, n.p), or “...Zimmerman acted in self-defense and totally within the law...” (Williams, 2013, n.p). Lower levels of the public’s support for the protester’s actions were categorized by two themes, *Othering*, and *Implications of Race*. Othering, the protesters, was illustrated in the comment sections by the commenters use of the word “they” (Williams, 2013, Williams et al. 2013, Brietbart, 2013), when referring to the protesters, which was a notation of identifying with a different social group (Giles, H. & Giles, J., 2013). This included sentiments such as, “The protesters NEVER do anything wrong. Why they are just standin’ there singing Kumbaya...”

(Breitbart, 2013, n.p.). Implications of Race was classified by commenters acknowledgment of race as either a factor in the case, in the protests, or a general issue. This included opinions such as, “Innocent because of one’s race is just as wrong as because of guilty because of one’s race” (Williams et al., 2013, n.p.), or “He got justice, it’s just not the result black people wanted...” (Williams, 2013, n.p.).

News articles which reported more *Police Action* and *Community Disruption* (i.e. “The demonstration was still underway at 2 a.m...” (Williams et al., 2013, n.p.), as a result of the protest/ protesters, revealed higher levels of both the public’s belief in cultural stereotypes and belief that protesters were violent or dangers to the community. The same comment sections saw significantly lower levels of acceptance or tolerance for the protest/ protesters. Cultural stereotypes, the longstanding biases associated with a particular racial group (Kahn et al., 2015), were exemplified in responses like: “Fools. Go get a job” (Williams et al., 2013), or “Wait until the EBT cards are not funded, that will be a riot...” (Breitbart, 2013, n.p.). These particular types of comments played into common stereotypes that Black peoples are lazy (Reyna, 2000), jobless (Nittle, 2011), or would “overestimate the percentage of African-Americans in poverty” (K.C., 2018, n.p.). Lastly, lower levels of the public’s acceptance or tolerance of or for the protest was classified as *Invalid Protest Reasoning*. To this effect, commenters would notate the reasons the protest should not have taken place such as: “They’re essentially campaigning for fascism, as they want someone convicted without due process” (Williams, 2013, n.p.). Ultimately, the study found that the way the journalist framed the analyzed news articles, specifically reporting on racially charged protests, led to an overall more significant rejection of those protests, by the public.

Impact of Biased Framing. Biased framing structure (i.e., timeline, quotes/ quote placement) most significantly affected the attitudes of the commenters. The research found several specific themes within the various comment sections, that could be attributed to how the article structured the information within the story. This included *Pattern of Paradigm*, which was the order in which journalists applied different elements of the protest paradigm, which appeared varied among articles. Historically, the news media have been biased toward protest groups, thus looking at “the pattern of delegitimizing coverage... by different media, or in different types of societies” (Lee, 2014, Boyle, M. P., McLeod, D. M., & Armstrong, C. L., 2012) was necessary to understand the effects of story structure.

The study found one news article featured the highest levels of *Protester Speech* (i.e., “When does it change” (Williams et al, 2013)”, and Othering (i.e. “it appears they caused little disruption” (Williams et al., 2013)”, but similar levels of *Protester Action* (i.e., “Protesters marched through the streets” (Williams et al., 2013)” as the other articles. As a result, that articles commenters displayed the highest levels of both *Implications of Race* (i.e. Enough of the “we are appressed” excuses and special treatment for a culture gone bad” (Williams et al., 2013)), as well as recognition of *Racial Oppression* (i.e “Violence is a personal necessity for the oppressed...it is not a strategy consciously devised...- Richard Wright Native Son” (Williams et al., 2013) by the commenters. This relationship between article themes and comment themes ultimately resulted in the reader’s acceptance of the protest reasoning, but general rejection of the protest for the Martin case specifically.

The second news article had the highest levels of *Quoted Officials*, (i.e., “There is a history of racial disparities in the application of our criminal laws,” (President Obama, 2013 as cited in Williams, 2013)). Similar levels of *Protester Action* (i.e. “called on the Department of

Justice to file a civil rights case” (Williams, 2013)), and was the only article to discuss race (i.e., President Barack Obama...suggested that the U.S. was still not “a post-racial society” (Williams, 2013)), or Stand Your Ground Laws (i.e. “jury instructions paving the way for his acquittal, came directly from the 2005 statute” (Williams, 2013)). This resulted in the comment section having the highest levels of notating *Race Issues* (i.e., There is still an awful lot of racial prejudice in the US.” (Williams, 2013)), and *Questioning the Media* (i.e., This is what happens when the media...get involved in the justice system” (Williams, 2013)), and similar levels of *Implications of Race* (i.e. “there is no justice there’s just us....” (Williams, 2013)). Consequently, this article had the highest levels of acceptance for the protesters and their protested cause among commenters.

Finally, the third article analyzed had the highest reports of *Protester’s Civic Disturbance* (i.e., protesters began throwing rocks and bricks at cars passing by...” (Breitbart, 2013)), *Police Action* (i.e., the police dispersed that crowd...” (Breitbart, 2013), and no reporting on *Protester’s Feelings*. This resulted in the articles comment section having the highest levels of both *Racial Stereotypes* (i.e. “the Blacks can’t help but turn to violence...” (Breitbart, 2013)) and notations of suspected *Protester Violence* by commenters (i.e. “Time to get out the rubber bullets. tasers, tear gas, police batons, dogs, horses, and police hoses... and let it rip the moment anyone becomes violet...” (Breitbart, 2013)). Subsequently, this led to the most significant level of rejection for the protesters and protested cause by commenters amongst the news articles.

Additional Findings

A priori, this research revealed several themes which were unanticipated and unrelated to the proposed research questions. The consistent pattern with which these themes appeared throughout the data proved significant in the overall understanding of the commenter’s attitudes

about U.S. race relations, and the judicial outcomes in racialized cases. These themes did not relate specifically to the proposed research questions, which addressed acceptance and/or rejection of the protesters/ protest groups. Instead, they revealed the reader's acceptance or rejection of the news articles themselves, as a valid or invalid source of information. The following themes were the most common points of discussion throughout the comment sections and were then utilized as the reasoning behind the articles questioning.

Zimmerman's Race. The first theme which was consistent across platforms was the notation of George Zimmerman's race. This was not a theme for the study which only analyzed original comments, and commentary about Zimmerman's race was nearly exclusively in response to another commenter who spoke about racial inequality or injustice. Commenters predominately identified Zimmerman's race as Hispanic and in response to claims that he may be a racist, or at the very least racially bias. The notation of Zimmerman's ethnicity used in this context implied two things; the first implication was that Zimmerman could not have been racist or racially prejudice because he is also a minority (i.e., "I guess these protesters forgot Zimmerman was Hispanic..." (Williams, 2013)). The second implication was that the issue was not due to race, nor was it a racially charged incident because "Zimmerman isn't White" (Williams, 2013). These types of comments implied that an issue could only be considered or recognized socially as an issue regarding race relations if it was between a Black and white person.

Justice was Served. Justice was served was another primary notation of commenters and was most predominantly notated while also speaking to the tragedy of Martin's death. Commenters preempted their feelings of acceptance for the case outcome with feelings of sorrow for either Martin himself or his family. This was followed by sentiments that regardless of the

outcome, justice had been served because the case concluded. “This is a tragedy, and I feel terrible for the Martin family... I don’t have a racist bone in my body. I believe in complete and total equality. For all races. What about the rule of law? Zimmerman was acquitted” (Williams, 2013). The impotence of these types of assumptions lays in the fact that despite the conclusion of the case, there has historically been a substantially sized discrepancy in the treatment of minorities and or issues concerning them within the judicial system (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2017).

Furthermore, commenters who believed justice was served or the judicial system was fair, also noted a belief in equality, and specifically that racial inequality was not a factor in the court process. Exemplified by comments such as: “Justice was done by the law... if you all find this case flawed or the outcome not to your liking using this racial crap, then pack your sorry self and bags...” (Williams et al., 2013). These points could be countered by historical context which is not referenced, misremembered, or made up in order to make the point that the verdict had been fair and without racial prejudices. The significance in these types of beliefs was the general acceptance of the verdict due to trust in the American judicial process. However, the fact remains that there has been a history of racial bias in the U.S. courtroom (Williams, 2018), and a verdict is not, and has not always been an indicator of justice, but rather the chance at justice (Berkun, 2013).

O.J. Simpson. One of the most racially problematic findings of this research were comments which referenced O.J. and or Nicole Simpson. Commenters repeatedly brought up the O.J. Simpson trial as an indicator of several things. The first was the expression of indifference that Zimmerman was acquitted, which was directly attributed by the commenter, to the fact that they believed Simpson was guilty and got away with a crime (i.e. “Nicole Simpson, Ron

Goldman, ‘nuff said” (Williams et al., 2013). The second was the implication that commenters believed Zimmerman was also guilty, but his acquittal was in some way “retribution” for the acquittal of Simpson in a trial which they were more emotionally invested (i.e., Not to mention OJ Simpson getting acquitted of 2 murders... by an all-black jury...” (Williams et al., 2013). The third notation of commenters was that racialized protests in general, were most likely due to the Simpson trial, rather than the issues within each specific case (i.e., “Today’s race riots brought to you by the letter O” (Williams, 2013).

Finally, commenters attitudes and assumption that Simpson was guilty countered their beliefs that the judicial system was fair regardless of the outcome. The case comparisons between Zimmerman and Simpson were additionally problematic because while there was not the evidence to convict either man, it is a legally and publicly recognized fact, that Zimmerman killed Martin. Simpson, however, maintained his innocence in the courtroom, yet commenters were sure about his guilt and indicated disapproval and rejection for the judicial system and or the verdict for that case.

Chapter 5- Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore various aspects of framing within the three news articles, which produced themes that should expand existing literature on framing racially charged protests. The analysis of the affect news discourse had on readers acceptance or rejection of a racially charged protest was completed in two stages. The first stage was an analysis of three different new articles covering the same protests. The second analyzed the articles comment sections and gathered themes and relationships among the two. This chapter will discuss the researches main findings from that analysis, interpret their meanings, and analyze the implications of the findings.

"The media provide a window on the world that helps to mold our beliefs and expectations, especially about the lesser-known aspects of the environment we live in" (Vaes, 2019, p. 12). While the news media provides a window, there remains a vantage point through which one can see inside or outside of it, and while the window may be the same, that makes the view vastly different. In this case, it was the "lesser-known aspects" of Black American's reality, for those who are not personally unimpacted or do not experience these events first hand, that this research was critically interested in examining. As consistent with Framing Theory, the study's most significant finding showed that higher reporting of 'Protester Action' was the single most influential factor among articles in establishing public acceptance or rejection of the racially charged protests. The choice of words used in each article framed how its readers then perceived the protest. The types of Protester Action (i.e., calling for action, shouting, or even throwing things) influenced commenters concern for the potential disruption to the community in which the protest was held, and led to their belief that it would put themselves or others in danger. Depending on the linguistic biases of the journalists, including whether they tended to use more abstract or concrete sentences, commenters fear for themselves and others significantly increased. Ultimately, this reasoning by the commenters was stated as to why support for the protesters and their cause was effectively rejected.

As Weaver (1994) notated, the problem that arises within any news report, is that its purpose is not merely to report or retell the events of the day, but to create a "story" of it, hence the term "news story." Within any news story, you have "characters, action, plot, point of view, and dramatic closure" (Weaver, 1994). To this point, news media outlets frequently seek out issues where "real people" can narrate their own stories because it helps "draw people in" (Thurber, 2013). This research, however, found that not to be true of the Black protester story,

which is typically ignored by the news media, or severely distorted (Monti, 1979). This distortion of information, created by a systematic bias, hindered commenters ability to connect with the Martin protest.

This research was critically interested in exploring the linguistic choices in news reports, as those narrative choices show how we "think, argue, persuade, display convictions, and establish identity" (Christians, C. G., Ferré, J. P., & Fackler, M., 1993). Word choice and the language we use provide road maps for others to follow, so the relationship between those choices and our meaning help communicate our beliefs (Christians et al., 1993). The study found that across all news articles and comment sections concern for the manner in which the protesters protested their cause was always questioned. Articles spoke of 'Protester Deviance,' or the potential for it, and subsequently, commenters took issue with the nature of the protest. Article notations like protests were "led by veteran civil rights leaders" (Williams, 2013, n.p), situated the protests legitimacy in their involvement with protest groups from the past, who are recognized now as legitimate. This framing which 'deployed of public memory' (Banks, 2018), implied that leaders from the past had to reemerge to guide the current protest groups, who were being illustrated as deviating from the 'good protester" prototype. This frame took the focus away from the social injustice's protesters were protesting against and shifted the focus instead to protest style. The "hope" for "continued peace" (Williams et al., 2013), or the notation that the protest began "peacefully" (Breitbart, 2013) was expressed in all of the news articles, which indicated the potential for something else to happen (i.e., Protester Violence, Protester Deviance). Subsequently, when sentiments of peace were regurgitated by the readers in the comment sections, the comments questioned the protester's capability for peace. Which

ultimately became the central reasoning for the reader's lack of empathy towards the protester's cause.

Protests are the minority or "outgroup's" social challenge to the power structures which disadvantage them (Monti, 1964). As the vast majority of journalists and news outlets are white, or under white ownership (Grieco, 2018), "the news," is primarily maintained by members of the "ingroup" (Rubin, Mark, Milanov, Millen, Paolini, & Stefania., 2014). Protests, then become a direct challenge to the power structures that help maintain the societal standing of the social group many journalists belong. Traditionally, journalists have not had to understand the shortcomings of their news reporting which can "present-biased pictures" of social conflict or issues being protested, and significantly affects minority communities (Monti, 1964). As an industry which has such enormous social impact, it is imperative we examine the prevailing biases within the news industry as to not continue to perpetuate them.

Ultimately, the study found that negative language and frames diminished the public's support for the protesters of the Trayvon Martin case in the news articles, which fostered their delegitimization of the cause. This was an exploratory work that can further the field by having thoughtful discussions about matters of race which will hopefully help determine the causes of paradigms which disparage protesters. This study found a qualitative approach particularly useful when examining language and in understanding the meaning behind the words being used in ways that other methods such as quantitative would not have been able to analyze to the same depth.

Limitations

As with any research study, the design of the current study did not come without limitations. First, it was the intent of this research to examine a wide demographic representative

of the US population. In the selection of both legacy news sources such as WAPO and less traditional platforms such as GARD or BRBT, a vast spectrum of ideologies could be examined. As consumers of the news are inherently biased in their selection of news sources (Mitchell et al., 2016), this also points to a news bias in that specific sources and sites are sought out due to their political slant. While more traditional news outlets such as Fox, CBS, MSNBC were considered, they were ultimately excluded from the research as their direct websites did not allow public commentary in response to new stories. While quality of new sources was an important consideration for this research, ultimately all three sources are considered reputable to those who read and discredited by those who don't. Therefore, it was more important to this research to have three new sources which reflected different political ideologies, than to limit the sources examined.

Next, the researcher recognizes that variances in the number of comments between news platforms, which ranged between under 20 and over 200 could have potentially affected overall findings in themes found from the individual comment sections. While looking at bias and its influence this research recognizes that everyone, be it persons of color or not, have biases that need to be taken into account. It is therefore acknowledged that the comment sections can be analyzed to have several different meanings based on my role as the researcher, which are affected by things like age, race, educational background, gender, etc., and may subsequently have been coded multiple times. One of the main differences in the coding process for the comment sections were the amount of coding possibilities, as well as the potential for misinterpretation of the opinions expressed by people, all of whom had varying levels of language and communication skills. This had the potential to influence how a particular comment or sentence was coded. While the research used a standard methodology for selecting

both news articles and their comments, selection bias could still occur. There was specifically a potential for bias when categorizing the content or meaning behind news articles based on the legacy or known reputation of said article, as well as the suspected commentary to be associated with each article.

Finally, while only "original responses" were analyzed from the comment sections in order to understand news reporting impact, it is also recognized that responses may have still been influenced by prior commentary. While the level of this influence could not be determined, it was the feeling of the researcher that the decision to post an initial response rather than a reply, notated the authors intent to respond to the news article rather than to another commenter. It was therefore concluded, that analyzing original responses only, helped the study to produce significant results overall.

Future Research

While this study generated important findings, the research produced further questions which could be explored by future studies. This particular research study was focused on the effects of online news content, future areas of research regarding framing, and the protest paradigm could focus on the effect social media has on the reporting of protest groups. In the increasingly digital news landscape, researchers could look to examine the way journalists cover protests on, and for social media, where platform restrictions may create other problems for how journalist construct news narratives. Additionally, while searching for and analyzing comment sections, it was observed that some news articles allowed commenters to employ the use of pseudonyms, or the option to login through Facebook accounts, presumably using their 'real name.' Future research may be interested in using this study's same methodology, in order to compare comments of

readers who use pseudonyms, to those who use 'real names' in order to determine if how major themes regarding race are expressed, or change based on the commenter's feeling of anonymity. Given the limitations of this research noted earlier, such as selection bias, I would encourage other researchers from diverse backgrounds to conduct similar research in this area. This will help to further understand the connection between news reporting biases and their influence on public opinion.

Summary

In conclusion, it is important to note that the news media serves as both an industry with an economic process that has financial goals and the need for readers attention, and as an industry with responsibilities to the public to bring truthful and vital information to the masses. It is essential to note the influence and impact the news can have, and to call attention to the amount of responsibility journalists face when making decisions on their reporting. The protesters of the Trayvon Martin case were marginalized and 'devoiced' (Lerman, A. E., & Weaver, V. M., 2014) by the news reports which both spoke predominately to their potential deviance from social norms exemplified by specific actions. This begged the question, how is the public's emotional response or "call to action" directly affected if the information they are consuming is biased, misleading, or just flat out incorrect as the result of journalists who may intentionally or unintentionally fall short of their responsibilities to the public?

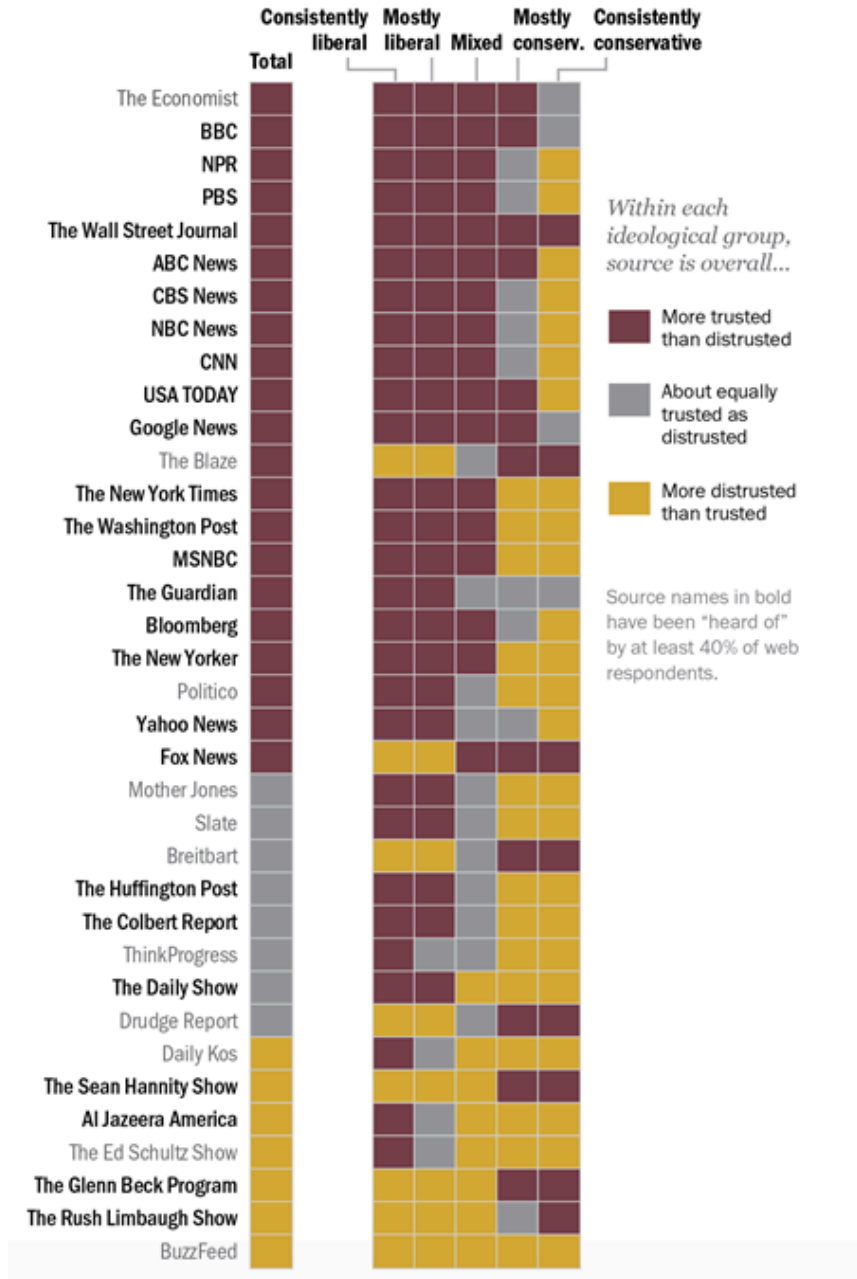
This research's methodology contributes to the field of Media Studies by exploring bias through language and news framing, how it's used when reporting on racialized protests, and in examining what ways that affects how we communicate important racial issues with one another. In this field of research when examining race or racially charged issues, it is imperative we understand that race is categorical, not ordinal. There is no completely neutral place to approach

a study for either persons of color or non-color when talking about racialized matters. The results of this study contribute to literature regarding framing theory by establishing how the application of news frames, when reporting on racially charged protests movements, influence public acceptance or rejection. "Social movements are not eternal. They have a life cycle: they are created, they grow, they achieve successes or failures and, eventually, they dissolve and cease to exist" (Boundless, n.d.). Movements such as BLM emerge out of necessity and are heavily impacted by social standing, as their objectives rely on community engagement. Practitioners of the press such journalists, reporters, editors, writers, communities, professional organizations, news companies, have a duty to attempt to ensure an equal platform for all kinds of voices to be heard and be represented.

The news is a tool by which the public forms their everyday opinions, perceptions of other people, and judgments on situations that may not directly affect them, which can ultimately affect their thought process. When it comes to reporting on sensitive topics, such as the brutality Black Americans face, both at the hands of other civilians as well as civil servants, traditional reporting protocols may lead to a biased form of reporting that can further inflame social tensions, as well as subdue the public's empathy or support. As this is the case, news reporters have a tremendous social obligation to understand and be aware of the impact their journalistic choices can have on the public. The ability to report the news in a manner that does not result in the social isolation of protestors (McLeod, D. M., & Hertog, J. K., 1992), by including all perspectives, is highly imperative for the reader's acceptance of the protested cause.

Appendix A.

Trust Levels of News Sources by Ideological Group



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