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BREAKING NEWS: THE PRESENCE OF FRAMING IN PARTISAN CABLE NEWS
NETWORK'S COVERAGE OF OFFICERS MURDERING BLACK VICTIMS

By

ANDREA C. SMITH

B.S. Louisiana State University, 2018

B.A. Louisiana State University, 2019

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed how the most partisan cable news networks, FOX News and MSNBC, framed victims and officers in their coverage of cases where officers murder Black victims. In addition, this work investigated how these networks discussed systemic racism within their reports. Using Feagin's white racial frame as a framework, the findings suggest that both networks exhibited anti-black and pro-white framing within their reports, although the frequency and the severity varied across networks. Results also show when counter framing was present, MSNBC still perpetuated the anti-black and pro-white frames. These results have implications for how media should improve their coverage of these cases to prevent the spread of harmful ideologies to their audiences.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Because of schemas, people are able to learn new information that is based on past experiences and knowledge (Barnett 2003, Fiske and Taylor 1991). Schemas are a collection of ideas, images, and feelings a person holds about something or someone (Gans 2019; Vinney 2019). In most cases, they are helpful as they serve as a shortcut in understanding a vast amount of information at once. This makes interpreting new information faster, simpler, and more efficient (Graber 1990), however, problems arise when schemas lead to the development of problematic racial stereotypes (Barnett 2003). Racial stereotypes are socially constructed beliefs that members of a certain racial group share certain characteristics, ideals, and morals (Green a.d). Said stereotypes are frequently perpetuated and reproduced by forces and systems external to individuals, all of which are considered authority figures to the everyday citizen. The objective of this thesis is to criticize organizations that continue to produce and reproduce racism through framing. As such, this study poses that said social authorities have a formidable impact on how racism is upheld in a racist society.

Scholars argue that news articles have a history of creating, producing, and spreading negative narratives and images of marginalized groups that help justify inequalities in the United States (Lane et al. 2020; Fridkin 2017; Adamson 2016; Dixon 2015; Abraham and Appiah 2006; Barnett 2003). For instance, when analyzing articles about the Trayvon Martin case, Lane et al. (2020) found that news outlets tended to frame Martin as a “criminal” or “thug”. Just like news articles, cable news is responsible for barraging viewers with these stereotypical images and ideas of racial groups via framing (Foreman et al. 2016). The way cable news frames marginalized groups has the power to influence racial behaviors and harmful ideas which,

according to Ortega and Feagin (2016), can encourage the discrimination of marginalized groups by upholding stereotypes (Foreman et al. 2016; Abraham and Appiah 2006). As Lane et al. (2020) has shown, these images will continue to pollute U.S institutions as they operate under Feagin's white racial frame which is defined by its belief of Black people being socially, economically, and politically inferior to white people (Lane et al. 2020; Feagin 2020). In other words, people who are not white are seen as wrong and are otherized. It is critical to understand the role of framing, especially in cases where injustices are clear such as when Black people are killed by law enforcement. An investigation of how they perpetuate the white racial frame within their reports is warranted.

While there is extensive literature on how Black people are covered and framed in the news and how they are portrayed and misrepresented (See Fridkin 2017; Adamson 2016; Dixon 2015; Abraham and Appiah 2006; Barnett 2003), a comparison between cable news networks that differ ideologically is lacking. In this study, I conducted a content analysis to investigate how the two most popular and most partisan cable news networks, MSNBC and FOX News, frame Black victims in cases where Black men are killed by law enforcement. I further investigated how these two news networks handle the conversation of systemic racism and police violence.

This study could potentially showcase how the white racial frame is within all cable news networks, even the ones that are more liberal and progressive showing how deeply this framing runs within U.S systems. Results from this study could help viewers become aware of the framing techniques used to uphold the white racial frame in cable news. Beyond that, I would like news networks to be aware of their influence and the ways in which they promote the white racial frame.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

Controlling Images, Master Narratives, and Colorblind Racism

Even though race is determined from physiological characteristics such as skin color, the concept of race has no biological basis as it is a social construct (Lentin 2017; Omi and Winant 2015; Templeton 2013) although it has real life consequences. The racial hierarchy is defined as a system that is based on the belief that one racial group is better than others (Song 2006). Traditionally, the facets and categories that rank race on this said hierarchy are determined by perceived civilization and superiority via intelligence, morality, and behavior (Anon n.d). This leads powerful leaders like doctors, politicians, judges, and ministers to label certain groups as less intelligent or moral than whites (Feagin 2020; Blumer 1958). The creation and perpetuation of these ideas by the white elite make it easy for the racial hierarchy to continue to exist in several institutions.

Most people view the racial hierarchy as being heavily associated with racism however, the hierarchy can exist and thrive without racist individuals (Carter and Lippard 2020; Bonilla-Silva 2006). Race and racial hierarchies are constructed, remade, and upheld by social practices and norms within institutions and organizations (Omi and Winant 2015; Bonilla-Silva 1998; Barnard 1993). As a result, we have institutions that were created to help the white elite but only at the expense of disadvantaging people of lower economic status and communities of color (Lane et al. 2020; Carter and Lippard 2020). In order to uphold these racial hierarchies, keep the white elite in power, and justify whites economic, social, and political domination (Feagin and Feagin 1999) stereotypes, controlling images, master narratives, and colorblind racist ideology are used and put in place (Lane 2017; Bonilla-Silva 2006).

Controlling images are stereotypical images that inaccurately exemplify a group of people. Said images normally represent how white people view and interact with individuals who are seen as “other” (Thakore 2016). They are based in racism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressive systems, and exist to misrepresent a group and justify the oppression and life experiences of marginalized groups, shift blame away from the systems that contribute to their oppression, and help injustices appear natural and a normal part of society (Thakore 2016; Collins 2000). In her book, *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins gives an overview of controlling images and how these racist images of Black people are gendered (Wingfield 2007). She specifically speaks on the negative images and stereotypes that are placed on Black women and how said stereotypical images dehumanize, exploit, and paint Black women as bad mothers and women; The “mammy” is portrayed as an overweight, domestic servant and serves the social, political and economic interest of white Americans (Pilgrim 2012), the “Matriarch” depicts single Black moms as bad and angry mothers, the “Welfare Mother” is illustrated as a lazy Black woman responsible for her unemployment and excess of children, and the “Jezebel” depicts Black women as hypersexual beings (Collins 1991, Collins 2000).

Many of the stereotypes and controlling images that we see today stem from the institution of slavery (Taylor et al. 2019). As a way to bring order and justify the enslavement of Black men, the white elite crafted the Sambo stereotype (Boskin 1986). The Sambo stereotype created this image of Black man as a carefree, happy, simple minded, docile, and lazy character that needed guidance from white slave owners (Green a.d) thus they were able to justify the enslavement of Black people. When slaves dominated the southern population, political interest groups had to devise how they were going to keep the white population safe and prevent runaway slaves from rebelling against them (Taylor et al. 2019; Barnard 1993). They developed

slave patrols to apprehend runaway slaves, scare slaves into not running and revolting, and punishing them for violating plantation rules by beating or killing them (Monkkonen 2004).

Once slavery was abolished, another moral panic was developed to justify the continued control and mistreatment of Black bodies (Taylor et al. 2019; Hall et al. 1978). Former slave owners began to generate the image of the Black male as inhumanly strong, hypersexual, insensitive to pain, and crime prone (Taylor et al. 2019, Green n.d), completely contradicting the previous lazy, careless, child-like image. This image demonized Black men and instilled fear in citizens which, in turn, led to socially sanctioned lynchings, castrations, and racialized legal doctrines which essentially legalized racism and hate crimes (Lane et al. 2020). While these images of Black men and women seem outdated, it is important to realize that stereotypical images never truly disappear; they are merely refined and updated to “reflect socio-political and cultural changes” (Wingfield 2007:198). These updates ensure that stereotypes continue to support and sustain white supremacy in the United States (Mallinson and Brewster 2006).

Master narratives are defined as the central or major social myths that attempt to disregard and silence racial struggle while reinforcing white supremacy (Woodson 2017; Lane 2017). The narratives function to reinforce American institutions and systems as just, moral, and fair, justify the lack of action to mitigate the symptoms of racial inequality, and affirm the ignorance of racial inequality (Sue 2016). Master narratives are also meant to uphold the status quo of which white people are the primary beneficiaries.

The dangerous part about these narratives is that most people do not realize how these problematic narratives benefit certain groups while simultaneously tearing down other groups, so individuals are less critical of them (Sue 2016). In addition, the way these narratives are framed makes it hard to criticize them (Sue 2016; Bonilla-Silva 2006). An example of a predominant

master narrative is that people need to be colorblind as race should not matter at any time and should not affect how someone is treated. While this seems reasonable to the everyday person, ignoring the race of an individual aids in ignoring patterns of inequality and discrimination based on race. This invalidates the experiences of racially marginalized groups (Williams 2011).

The idea that people should be colorblind is a master narrative, although colorblind racist ideology in and of itself is a way that the racial hierarchy is reinforced as well. Colorblind racist ideology as outlined by Bonilla-Silva includes the following tenets: minimization of racism, naturalization, abstract liberalism, and cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva 2015). The minimization of racism suggests that racial discrimination is no longer something that affects communities of color. This tenet allows people to discount or simply ignore cases of racial discrimination because it is something that is in the past and is no longer an issue for communities of color. Naturalization refers to the idea that people naturally gravitate to and live around people who look like them. Naturalization is often used as an excuse for segregation. Abstract liberalism uses ideas related to political and economic liberalism such as the idea that everyone should have equal opportunity, and everyone has a choice in the life they live (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This functions as a way for the majority to "express concern for racial inequality while simultaneously opposing race-specific policies" (Stoll and Klein 2018:218). Following the abstract liberalism thought process, if a person of color is experiencing the adverse effects of racism it is their fault because racism is no longer an issue. This leads to the cultural racism tenet which relies on a culturally based argument to explain the standing of marginalized groups in the U.S (Bonilla-Silva 2006). One who holds the cultural racism frame believes if minoritized groups are facing issues there must be something wrong with their cultural ethics and morals.

Racial Framing in Cable News and The White Racial Frame

Robert Entman (2003:52) defines framing as the action or ability to select "some facets of events or issues and make connections among them as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation or solution" by using words and images that are important to the culture. Framing has the power to construct our realities, reinforce our choices, thought processes, behavior and attitudes on many topics and structure our everyday lives (Carter and Lippard 2020; Ortega and Feagin 2016; Goffman 1974). Needless to say, framing is a powerful tool that media can and does use. Without framing, many of the events present in the news do not have meaning by themselves. These networks must create meaning through framing and representation (Stuart Hall as cited by The Media Insider 2019). Simply put, meaning is given to the event presented in the news as the event has no meaning until it is presented by the leaders in these networks. Most of the time said leaders are the white elite so the interpretation of events reflect their ideology and protects white supremacy.

Media outlets like cable news play a critical role in reproducing and perpetuating the savage, criminal stereotype and help keep this image alive in the minds of people today (Carter and Lippard 2020). According to Frey (2020), 71% of white Americans still live in majority white neighborhoods and 45% of Black Americans live in majority Black neighborhoods, meaning that people are not interacting across racial lines due to segregation via discriminatory housing practices and zoning policies (Rothstein 2017; Tatum 2017). Because of the lack of interaction, individuals often rely on what social media, movies, TV shows and the news tells them about people of color (Thakore 2016; Ray 2015). The problem with this is that these sources should not serve as a reference for everyday life as they are not accurate. For instance, crime news reported through broadcasted news has been shown to have a gross

overrepresentation of minoritized groups in more negative roles like the criminal or suspect and showcases white people in more positive roles such as the victim or police officer (Thakore 2016; Dixon 2015). Another study conducted by Dixon and Linz (2000) had similar findings when analyzing local news reports in Los Angeles; Black people were depicted as suspects and law breakers while white people were the law defenders. This overrepresentation of Black people as criminals do not match real crime statistics. When looking at local news reports in New York, 70% of murders they report on were committed by Black people but when looking at NYPD data and arrest records on murder, that number declines to 54% (Color of Change 2015). This presence and absence of Black people in certain roles continue to perpetuate the savage or criminal stereotype. In addition, the crimes that Black people commit in the news tend to be more violent, further perpetuating this image of Black people as criminal, violent, and dangerous (Oliver 2003).

Framing has the power to make events or actions less salient as well. Many of the important details are “largely left untold” by news media (The Opportunity Agenda 2011:26). In some ways, cable news supports problematic racial attitudes and the rejection of institutional racism by omitting how systems can contribute to criminality; the most notable examples being how poverty and unemployment can raise crime rates (The Opportunity Agenda 2011; Entman 2006) and how employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and other institutional discrimination can lead to unemployment and economic insecurity (Hanks et al. 2018). Instead, the news tends to focus on who is committing crimes and other symptoms of deep systemic issues (Aubrun et al. 2005). When controlling for employment, employed Black people are just as law abiding as employed white people (Entman 2000; Wilson 1996) further highlighting how

external forces play into criminality. Omitting this information can make it easy to blame Black communities for the position they are in (Aubrun et al. 2005; Entman 2000).

In his definition, Entman mentions how important images and language are in the framing process. Visual images and language are ways in which the news frames a story. Visual images tend to be more salient and attention grabbing than auditory information (Neuman et al. 1992) so the *ways* in which people are seen in crime news is just as important as how *frequently* they are seen. For instance, Entman (1990) found violent crimes committed by Black suspects were covered differently than white suspects. Black criminals were seen in handcuffs, unnamed, and escorted by police while white criminals were escorted by their lawyers, were named, spoke for themselves, and wore suits. It is also worth mentioning mugshots of Black suspects were shown while mugshots of white suspects were never shown (Entman 1990). By doing this, news networks are dehumanizing Black people and suggesting that they are dangerous leading viewers to think that they are automatically guilty, more likely to commit a future crime, and more deserving of punishment than white suspects (Abraham and Appiah 2006; Barnett 2003; Peffley et al. 1996).

Many researchers have tried to offer multiple explanations for the media's continued use of stereotypical images and problematic language. One reason heavily documented in the literature is incognizant racism or "everyday racism in the newsroom" (Dixon 2003:217; Heider 2000). Constant socialization and employing white journalists, anchors, and editors cause news networks to report stories in a racially biased manner (Dixon 2003; Heider 2000) hence why Black people are constantly portrayed negatively and why white people are always the victims and heroes (Dixon 2015). Another reason researchers believe that white media continues to paint this negative picture of Black people in the news is economic interest. These news networks tend

to report and talk about topics in a way that appeals to and fits the dominating discourse of their audience at the time (Dixon 2015). For instance, 74% of FOX News viewers and 70% of MSNBC viewers are white (Public Opinion Strategies 2019) meaning that these stations create and cover cases that appeal to this demographic even if it means heavily distorting images and portrayals of Black people. If these networks were to deviate from what their audiences want and believe, they risk losing them as viewers. This then affects how much money the networks make (Dixon 2015) which explains why they continue to cover topics that their audience cares about in a way that affirms what their audience already believes.

While all these factors explain why mainstream media uses these tactics, the perpetuation of these images does not just stop at editors wanting to appeal to their audience and general racial bias. The problem is more complex than the ideology of prejudiced people. As stated earlier, these problematic ideas often come from groups external to the individual such as the media, political leaders, and the power elite (Carter and Lippard 2020:5; Blumer 1958). The white racial frame proposed by Joe Feagin can be used to explain why these images persist and are upheld in society. The white racial frame is used in the United States to justify, rationalize, and shape the oppression of minoritized groups and the inequality they experience. In other words, the white racial frame is used to explain a lot of the inequality that white Americans see through their white minds and white experiences (Feagin 2020:4). It also helps white people deny the role they play in the oppression of marginalized groups.

The white racial frame has two major subframes: a pro-white and anti-black subframe. The pro-white subframe is used to affirm white supremacy and assert the idea of whiteness as virtuous, civilized, morally correct and normal while viewing racism as nonexistent, and perceiving the world through a colorblind lens (Feagin 2020). The anti-black frame is used to

demonize, otherize, and criminalize blackness (Feagin 2020). Both subframes can be seen in cable news in cases where Black men are shot by law enforcement. The pro-white subframe can be used to uplift law enforcement and the institutions that protect them while the anti-black frame can be used to demonize, devictimize, and criminalize Black men (Lane 2017). Feagin also speaks on counter framing which is the main way to address and criticize the white racial frame. Counter framing is the act of refuting both subframes. Examples include speaking on the resilience of Black communities despite the generation of negative stereotypes and mistreatment; mentioning the hypocrisy of U.S society (termed the liberty and justice for all frame), critiquing the self-proclaimed morality, wisdom and enrichment of white people, and calling for revolutionary action (Feagin 2020).

From what we have seen and experienced in history, elite white men are the main population that benefits from the white racial frame; therefore, they are the main perpetrators of this frame. The white racial frame is woven right into social and cultural institutions in the United States such as schools, the workplace, courts, mainstream media, family, and friends (Feagin 2020) so many people learn the frame through socialization. Because of the sheer scope and number of people this frame reaches, anyone who participates in U.S institutions is exposed to this frame and are likely to uphold it in some way (Feagin 2020), regardless of race or political party. In this paper, I focus on how cable news networks like FOX News and MSNBC continue to reinforce the white racial frame. More specifically, I will investigate how these cable news networks demonize and criminalize the Black victims, uplift and shift blame away from the officers, and limit counter framing in their reports.

MSNBC and FOX News

According to Ad Fontes Media's Media Bias Chart (2020), MSNBC and FOX News have the most partisan audiences and are on the opposite ends of the political spectrum. Because of the sheer differences in political opinion, they are sure to cover cases where Black men are killed by law enforcement differently. However, because most institutions in the United States operate under the white racial frame, I hypothesize that they are both likely to promote the pro-white and anti-black subframes and omit counter framing from their reports. Before coming to these conclusions, it is important to look at the development of these networks, their pattern of behavior, and why they may cover these cases as hypothesized.

With an investment from Microsoft and the leadership of Tom Rogers, an NBC executive, MSNBC was launched on July 15th, 1996. Similarly to the broadcasting of FOX, MSNBC sought to be a network dedicated to objective and fact-based reporting (Xue 2012), but they decided to change directions taking on the identity of being a news source for progressives (MSNBC 2010; Stelter 2010) or the "antithesis" to FOX News (Kurtz 2008). For example, during the 2008 presidential race, the Project for Excellence in Journalism found that MSNBC had more positive coverage of Obama and more negative stories about John McCain (Pew Research Center 2008).

While MSNBC is more liberal leaning than FOX, their views on race and racism still leave much to be desired and have been called into question by social scientists. The term post-racial has been used in mainstream news since 1990 (Bell 2019; Squires 2014), although Americans began making post-racial claims mere decades after emancipation (Drabinski and Marsh 2014). This term has been a part of American society for quite some time although the use of this term by the news industry spiked after Barack Obama was elected (Bobo 2011). Citizens and journalists alike saw his elected victory as a sign that Black people had achieved racial

equality in the United States even though there is evidence that shows the opposite (Dawson and Bobo 2009). Claiming that we live in a post-racist society operates to minimize persistent institutional racism and declare racist behavior as individual, offhand anomalies (Bell 2019; Squires 2014).

MSNBC has a history of expressing colorblind racist tenets as well as post-racist sentiments despite being considered more liberal than FOX News. For example, a few months after Obama was elected, Chris Matthews, the host of MSNBC at the time, expressed that Obama was "post-racial" and that he "forgot he was Black" (Graham 2017). He has also expressed that "ethnic and racial issues always get in the way of arguing over real issues" (Joe et al. 2008). These two statements attempt to minimize and discredit how deeply engraved race and racism are in society today. I expect MSNBC will uphold the white racial frame and reproduce a negative narrative of Black men who were killed by law enforcement, based on their history of spouting colorblind racist ideology and expressing post racist sentiments. They are also likely to focus more on the individual prejudice of the police officers and not on institutional racism.

FOX News was launched on October 7th, 1996 by Rupert Murdoch, a media mogul known for his conservative views. Murdoch hired Roger Ailes, a Republican media and political consultant, as the news network's CEO. Ailes claims that FOX News was meant to be a bias-free, fact-based news network with less spin, so viewers could make up their own minds about a story or situation (; Morris 2005; Auletta 2003). This bias-free approach has been debunked in mass media and in social science literature, which finds that FOX News does not take an unbiased approach when reporting, favoring the Republican party (Domke 2001). For example, FOX News spoke very positively of the Iraq war (Croft 2006). In addition, Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy (2017) found that during Trump's first 100 days, he

was covered negatively 80% of the time across all other networks while FOX's coverage was only negative 52% of the time.

FOX News also has a history of using colorblind rhetoric, defending police officers, and making overtly racist statements. For example, Tucker Carlson, a political commentator, once stated "there aren't that many hate crimes occurring in the country" so people have to "make them up" (Messer 2019). This statement completely minimizes racism and ignores the increasing number of hate groups that have been springing up over the last few years (Southern Poverty Law Center 2019). When speaking on the death of Eric Garner, Joe Cardinale, a guest on FOX and Friends, defended the officer who killed him, stating that "I don't see it as an outright chokehold... [just] comply. Just don't fight, don't resist. Now you have this big man resisting and we have seen how things on the street can go sour in seconds..." (Media Matters Staff 2019a). This implied that the only reason Garner died was because he was resisting and perceived to be dangerous by the cop who apparently was afraid of Garner due to his preconceived notions about Garner. Heather MacDonald, another guest on FOX News, explicitly stated that college admissions should "go back to a colorblind meritocratic system" and blamed Black culture for the racial gap in academic achievement (Media Matters Staff 2019b). By referencing meritocracy and blaming Black culture, MacDonald effectively played into the tenets of abstract liberalism and cultural racism. Based on these comments made on FOX News, I anticipate that they will uphold the white racial frame by reproducing a negative narrative of Black victims, shift blame away from the officer, and limit discussions of how institutional racism and discrimination played a part in their killings.

I expect both networks to continue to perpetuate the white racial frame within their reports, but because they differ ideologically, I hypothesize that the severity of the frames will

fluctuate. In other words, I do envision there being nuance in how frequently the two networks present the anti-black and pro-white frames. However, I hypothesize that the anti-black and pro-white frames will be present within both networks.

CHAPTER THREE DATA AND METHODS

Case Selection

According to the Statista Research Department (2021), between 2017 and 2020, 893 Black people were murdered by police officers. Given that many Black individuals are killed by law enforcement yearly, there is a wide sample from which to choose. I will analyze eight cases. The cases selected are identified by a New York Times article as being predominate cases where a Black person was killed by law enforcement or died in police custody between 2014 and 2016 (Lee and Park 2017) which corresponds with the establishment of BLM. The BLM movement has been instrumental in bringing these injustices to light, framing them not only as a civil rights issue but as a violation of human rights (Roberts 2020). The BLM movement has helped push cable news networks to acknowledge the deaths of these Black individuals as well as generate discourse amongst citizens surrounding police brutality, the killing of Black bodies, and other racial injustices that exist due to systemic racism (Del Real et al. 2020)., hence the importance of looking at cases around the time of their inception. The cases are as follows:

- **Eric Garner** was 43 years old. On July 17th, 2014, Daniel Pantaleo, a New York Police officer, approached Garner as he thought he was selling single cigarettes. After verbally expressing his frustration with being harassed by law enforcement, Pantaleo attempts to arrest Garner using an unauthorized chokehold. Garner let Pantaleo and other officers know that he was unable to breathe multiple times. After a while, Garner lost consciousness. Garner was pronounced dead at the hospital. Garner was unarmed.

- **Michael Brown** was 18 years old. On August 9th, 2014, he was walking down Canfield Drive when Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, blocks the street with his SUV. There is an altercation between Wilson and Brown and shots were fired from Wilson's SUV. Brown runs and Wilson runs after him. Brown stops, puts his hands up, and is fatally shot by Wilson. Brown was unarmed.

- **Tamir Rice** was 12 years old. On November 22nd, 2014, he was at a park playing with a toy gun. Cleveland Police officers were called on the scene. Almost as soon as they arrived on the scene, Timothy Loehmann shot Rice. He later died at the hospital. Rice was unarmed.

- **Walter Scott** was 50 years old. On April 4th, 2015 he was stopped by a North Charleston officer, Michael Slager, because his brake light was out. Once stopped, Scott ran on foot and Slager ran after him. There was then an altercation between Scott and Slager but Scott was able to break free and run. Slager then drew his gun and shot Scott in the back, killing him. Scott was unarmed.

- **Alton Sterling** was 37 years old. On July 5th, 2016, Sterling was selling CD's outside of a convenience store when Baton Rouge police were anonymously called stating that Sterling was threatening them. When he arrived on the scene Officer Blane Salamoni tased Sterling, forced him onto the hood of a car, and fatally shot him.

- **Philando Castile** was 32 years old. On July 6th, 2016 Castile was stopped by Jeronimo Yanez, an officer in the St. Anthony police department. Castile informed Yanez that he had a gun although he had a license to carry it. Yanez tells him not to reach for it. Castile and his girlfriend affirm that he was not going to reach for it, twice. Yanez then shoots Castile after only interacting with him for 40 seconds. He later died at the hospital.

- **Terence Crutcher** was 40 years old. On September 16th, 2016, his car stopped on the street, and he believed that it was going to blow up. A bystander called in stating his car was blocking traffic. Betty Jo Shelby and Tyler Turnbough, Tulsa officers, responded. When on the scene, Crutcher did not follow some of the orders given to him by officers. Turnbough was ordered to tase Crutcher by officers in a helicopter. After he was tased, he was shot by Shelby. Crutcher died at the hospital later that day and was unarmed.

- **Keith Lamont Scott** was 43 years old. On September 20th, 2016, Scott was stopped by four officers on a suspicion that he may have drugs and a gun on him. An officer attempted to arrest Scott by banging on his front car window. He got out of his car. Scott was then shot by Brentley Vinson, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer, while his hands were by his side and his back was facing Vinson.

The high-profile cases where Black people are killed by law enforcement are cases where Black men are murdered, omitting cases where Black women and trans Black women are murdered. Even with BLM's help in making these cases salient in the news, Black women and trans Black women are still left out of the conversation (Jacobs 2017). The murders of these women are consistently erased by the police and news networks via their lack of coverage (Jacobs 2017) meaning that many of the cases where Black and Black trans women were murdered by officers are not considered high profile cases therefore, they are not included in the current study. Living in a Black body that is not male or cisgender leaves one vulnerable to being

forgotten and invisible (Young and McMahon 2020). They should not be left out of these conversations as they are also victims of police violence not only because of their race but also because of their gender and sexual orientation.

News Networks

The two cable news networks that I have chosen as the base for analysis are: FOX News and MSNBC given that they have the most partisan audiences (Grieco 2020). According to Ad Fontes Media (2020), FOX News leans right while MSNBC leans left. In addition, they are the most watched networks in the United States, with FOX News reaching 3.57 million viewers during primetime and MSNBC reaching 2 million (Porter 2020). If the white racial frame were present in both news networks, millions of people would be exposed to it.

Procedure

The news transcripts for all cases were collected from Nexis Uni using the name of the victim. News stories within the first seven days of the death were used as this is the typical timeline for a big news story until another story takes the spotlight (Schema Design and Google Trends 2019, Owen 2019). Covering reports within the first week of the cases also aids in avoiding stories that talk about legal proceedings and the protests that arose because of the murders (Smiley and Fakunle 2016).

The number of cable news transcripts I am analyzing can be found in Table 1. I have identified and coded 198 cable news stories across all cases and news networks. With the help of my research assistants, Mya and Reckuria Smith, the transcripts were sorted to exclude dialogue that did not involve or relate to the cases focused on in this study. Several features of the cases were examined, such as how the police officers and victims were framed based on Feagin's pro-

white and anti-black frames, and the presence of counter framing. In order to identify anti-black, pro-white, and counter framing in the cable news transcripts, an inductive approach was taken to isolate these three frames by looking at “racial ideologies, interpretations, narratives, racialized emotions, reactions and language accents” within descriptions, phrases, and general word choices (Lane et al. 2020:797). According to Feagin, “over centuries of operation [the white racial frame] has encompassed both a strong positive orientation to whites and whiteness and a strong negative orientation to the racial other” or blackness (Feagin 2020:19). With this in mind, if a negative connotation was projected onto the Black victims, it was coded as anti-black. A similar approach was taken for the pro-white frame. If the officers are given sympathy or are exonerated, it was coded as pro-white. If the narratives that the network present oppose the anti-black and pro-white frames, it was coded as counter framing. A holistic coding approach was also taken to allow emergent frames to become salient (Saldaña 2021).

Table 1: The number of news transcripts that are being analyzed by news network and case.

Cases	FOX News	MSNBC
Eric Garner	2	7
Michael Brown	21	33
Tamir Rice	1	6
Walter Scott	16	22
Alton Sterling	16	14
Philando Castile	11	9
Terence Crutcher	5	11
Keith Lamont Scott	11	13
Total	83	115

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS

In order to identify anti-black, pro-white, and counter framing in the cable news transcripts, an inductive and holistic coding approach was taken to isolate these three frames and allow other frames to become salient. Feagin's anti-black, pro-white and, counter frame was present in both cable news transcripts although the frequency and the severity of the frames varied across network. One additional frame, institutional trust, emerged from the transcripts as well, along with four subframes. A visual of all frames, subframes, and themes can be seen in Figure 1.

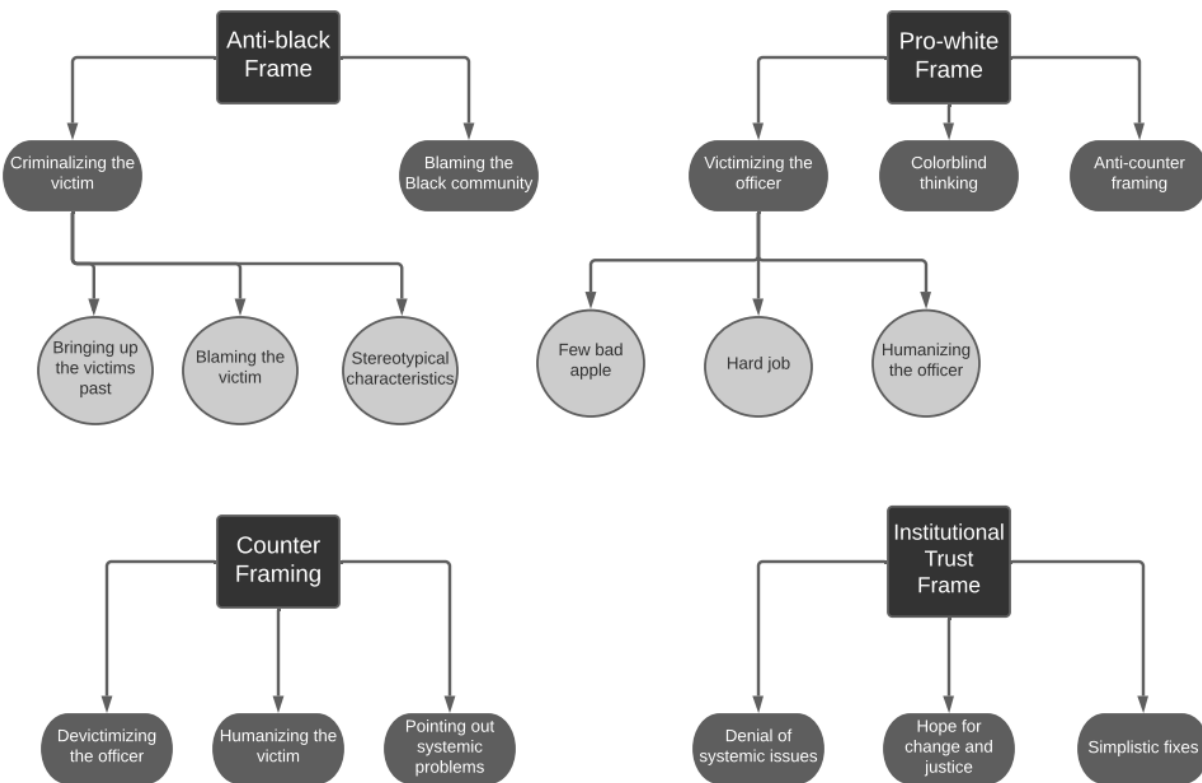


Figure 1: Frames, subframes, and themes that emerged from the news transcripts.

Anti-Black Frame

Under the anti-black frame, subframes such as criminalizing the victim and blaming the black community were identified. Cable news networks were able to criminalize and devictimize the victim by doing at least one of three tactics: bringing up the victim's criminal record, blaming the victim for their death, and bringing up stereotypical characteristics that the victim exhibited.

Criminalizing the victim

Bringing up past records of the victim: When news pundits or guests on both networks brought up the past record of the victims, it was normally done to criminalize these victims and justify their death. Most of the time such information was not needed and was brought up unprovoked. For instance, when trying to clarify if Alton Sterling had a permit to carry on FOX, Gutfeld stated that Sterling had "a fairly long rap sheet." Keith Scott's past was brought up by Jesse Watters, a political commentator on FOX News. Watters stated that "he had a DUI conviction [and] an assault conviction." He further blamed Sterling for his death by saying "...he was armed [and] didn't obey commands".

MSNBC also had instances where they mentioned the past record of as victim although it was not as frequent as FOX News. After reporting why the officers were harassing Garner, Chris Hayes mentions that "Garner had been arrested over 30 times." While FOX and MSNBC both brought up the past records of the victims, MSNBC tended to counter the past record with another narrative. For example, after mentioning that Garner had been arrested numerous times, they stated that he "previously complained about being harassed by the police" suggesting that the number of arrests came from him being overly policed. In the case of Michael Brown, MSNBC did mention that many people reported that he "was not innocent and he had a rap sheet," but they affirmed that these statements were untrue.

Blaming the victim: There were times in which the victim was blamed for their killing whether it was through emphasizing that the victim was committing a crime before they were killed or blaming them for not complying with the orders given to them. This was a tactic mainly seen in FOX reports. Tamara Holder, a guest on FOX, tried to convince Hannity and other guests that the officer murdered an innocent man, but another guest made it clear that Garner was “not an innocent man by definition”. Tamir Rice was blamed for playing with a toy gun in the park because the “orange safety indicator” was removed. In Garner’s case, both MSNBC and FOX mentioned that he had a bad heart and asthma, implying that it was not the officer’s illegal use of a chokehold that killed him, but his underlying medical conditions. While both networks made this point, FOX News explicitly states that this is how Garner died and that his cries for help were not because of the chokehold but because of his asthma:

He's asthmatic. He probably said that going upstairs. And I don't mean that to be flippant.
– Davis, FOX, Eric Garner Case

This guy died because of his medical problems – Bo Dietl, FOX, Eric Garner Case

Stereotypical Characteristics: There were instances where it was implied that the victim died because they were Black men and exhibited characteristics that were associated with blackness. Bringing up said characteristics aids in further criminalizing the victims and make them seem more threatening. For instance, Eric Garner’s weight was frequently mentioned when describing the events that led to his death:

Now, in this very disturbing video, after Eric Garner refuses to be arrested peacefully, you can see one of the officers, well, put the 6'3", 350-pound man into a choke hold while the other officers attempt to wrestle him to the ground. – Hannity, FOX, Eric Garner Case

Garner weighed around 350 pounds – Chris Hayes, MSNBC, Eric Garner Case

As mentioned earlier, Black victims tend to be pegged as aggressive, dangerous, and a threat (Cottrell and Neuberg 2005; Oliver 2003). News networks can reinforce this narrative by emphasizing the victim's physical size and labeling them as large, heavy, and muscular (Wilson et al. 2017). This then further justifies why the officer shot the victim and why they were afraid.

In Philando Castile's case, he was pulled over because he matched the profile of a suspect they were looking for because of his "wide set nose". Keith Scott also looked like a suspect that officers were searching for and was put in a similar situation. This was featured on both FOX and MSNBC although FOX overlooked that the officers killed people who had nothing to do with the search of these other suspects and opted to emphasize that the victims were still in the wrong. FOX was also more sympathetic towards the officers, implying that they were just doing their jobs:

And Megyn, we're going to play you dispatched audiotapes obtained by two Minneapolis news outlets that appear to show that a broken taillight was not the reason Roseville police initially pulled over Philando Castile instead one of the officers believed he was following a robbery suspect. - Trace Gallagher, FOX, Philando Castile Case

Police were in the area searching for a suspect. Scott was not that suspect. But the police chief as you heard says, Scott exited the vehicle with a firearm and then got back into the car and when officers approached they gave loud and clear instructions also heard by witnesses to drop the weapon. Inside the Chief says, Keith Lamont Scott got back out of the car, weapon in hand. – Trace Gallagher, FOX, Keith Scott Case

Blaming the Black Community

The final subframe that was present in the anti-black frame was blaming the Black community for the violence in Black communities which was often labeled as Black on Black crime. This seemed to function as a way to derail the conversation away from the policing problem and refocus the attention on symptoms of systemic racism. This subframe was exclusively seen in FOX News reports:

One of the things we should be up in arms about, that I'd like to see them talk about the communities and then churches, you know, throughout to this country is black on black crime in areas that suffer, you know, disproportionately, socio-economically. And you see they are struggling for jobs, they are struggling to have safe communities and clean streets. So, I want to be very careful to not just focus all of it on police officers, because we've also seen some incredible leadership coming out of the police departments. – Kimberly Guilfoyle, FOX, Keith Scott Case

But the focus of the civil rights community here, it really is troublesome here because, what Al Sharpton and others are trying to do is pretend that our morgues are full of young black men because cops are shooting them. When the reality is that, Black people are shooting Black people. And that is much bigger problem than cop shooting Black people. -Jason Riley, FOX Michael, Brown Case

Pro-White Frame

Under the pro-white frame, subframes such as victimizing the cop, colorblind thinking, and anti-counter framing were present. Under victimizing the cop, three themes were present: proclaiming the job was hard, emphasizing that not all cops are bad cops, and humanization of the officer.

Victimizing the Officer

Hard job: On both news networks, news pundits and guests tried to victimize these officers by attempting to emphasize how difficult and dangerous it was to police:

On a regular basis we bring in those who have done heroic work in law enforcement and have survived. Sometimes they have been injured. Sometimes they risk their lives in remarkable ways, and we applaud them and appreciate them, because they are doing a really tough job really well.- Eric Bolling, FOX, Alton Sterling Case

Well, I think the message should be that our officers have an extremely difficult job, give them the benefit of the doubt, you know, we're human just like everyone else, we're going to make mistakes, and it's just important to know those mistakes will be thoroughly investigated and as you've seen in a case like Tulsa and other cases around the country, officers are going to be held accountable for their actions, although having some very, very difficult situations every day.- John Mina, FOX, Keith Scott Case

MSNBC also exhibited this theme, although it normally came from clips they showed on air. For instance, when speaking on the Philando Castile case and the Alton Sterling case, MSNBC played clips of Obama speaking on the case:

I want to be very clear. We know you have a tough job. We mourn those in uniform who are protecting us who lose their lives on a regular basis. I have joined with families in front of Capitol Hill to commemorate the incredible heroism that they've displayed. I've hugged family members who've lost loved ones doing the right thing. I know how much it hurts. On a regular basis we bring in those who have done heroic work in law enforcement and have survived. Sometimes they've been injured, sometimes they risk their lives in remarkable ways and we applaud them and appreciate them because they're doing a really tough job really well. - Barack Obama, MSNBC, Philando Castile Case

We have extraordinary appreciation and respect for the vast majority of police officers who put their lives on the line to protect us every single day. They've got a dangerous job. It is a tough job. And as I've said before, they have a right to go home to their families, just like anybody else on the job. And there are going to be circumstances in which they have to make split-second decisions, we understand that. – Barack Obama, MSNBC, Alton Sterling Case

It is interesting that MSNBC chose to utilize the voice of not only the president of the United States at the time to discuss the difficulty of policing, but the voice of a Black man. By utilizing the voice of a Black man to proclaim a pro-white view they are weaponizing a Black voice to perpetuate their white views.

Few Bad Apples: In addition to highlighting the difficulty of policing, pundits and guests would also tend to highlight that not all cops are bad cops or the cops that killed these victims were just a “few bad apples in the bunch.” This theme was especially seen in FOX news in Walter Scott's case as pundits and guests agreed that his death was unjustified and the cop was in the wrong:

You think of the cops that have been shot in aftermath of what happened in Fergusson, what happened after the Eric Garner case. This tarnishes the reputation of every good cop out there, Geraldo, and the vast majority of cops that protect and serve. – Hannity FOX, Walter Scott Case

What this officer did, in my opinion, is disgrace the very uniform and the very badge that men and women, not just in South Carolina, but throughout the country take pride in. It runs in families like mine; the respect, that doing the right thing to help others, it is -- their sacrifices they make. And I cannot thank the good officers enough. – Justin Bamberg MSNBC, Walter Scott Case

This theme of differentiating good and bad cops is also present in other cases across both networks:

Again, part of what we saw this week is just atrocious policing. If you think that someone has a gun, the first thing you learn in police academy is you don't roll up on that person and expose yourself to gunfire, and then use that as an excuse to gun them down. You have to protect yourself. You have to conceal yourself. - Paul Butler, MSNBC, Philando Castile Case

...we're anti-bad police. In fact, good police are anti-bad police because it makes it bad for all good police. - Rev. William Barber, MSNBC, Keith Scott Case

So there are 600,000 law enforcement officers in this country. The vast -- vast majority of them are great cops. Sometimes they make a mistake. -- Eric Bolling, FOX, Philando Castile Case

Humanizing the officer: The humanization of the officer was also a common theme under victimizing the cop subframe. Cases where pundits or guests brought up the fact that an officer had a family, was a veteran of the force or was scared when they shot the victim was coded as humanizing the officer as humanization could make someone appear less guilty. This was exclusively seen on FOX News:

...the two officers involved, one a four-year veteran with the Department, the other had three years on the force, have both been put on administrative leave while this investigation plays out – Casey Stegall, FOX, Alton Sterling Case

The officer was then fired from the police department where he worked, although the department says they will still pay for his family health insurance, in part because the officer's wife is eight months pregnant. - Maddow, MSNBC, Walter Scott Case

If you pulled the firearm in the officer, if he didn't disclose it, if the officer feel threatened – Megyn Kelly, FOX, Philando Castile Case

Colorblind Thinking

The second subframe present in the pro-white frame is colorblind thinking. In the subframe, pundits and guests would reaffirm that the officers involved in these cases were not racist and that they did not shoot the victims based on the color of their skin. This subframe was exclusively presented in FOX's transcripts which counters my hypothesis:

And certainly, can we just hold off judgment about color? Because if that guy was white in the passenger seat of that car, and that cop was as nervous as he was -- if you look at that videotape, he was petrified, his hands were shaking -- it wouldn't matter if he was

white, black, brown, doesn't matter what color he was, he was probably going to pull the trigger also. – Eric Bolling, FOX, Philando Castile Case

I didn't see a black man killed by a white cop. I saw a man shoot another man in the back. I saw an actual act. There's no -- you can't -- you can't theorize. You can't, you can't come up with hypothetical. You actually see that. Unlike talking heads like us or activists, the camera sees more than color. – Kimberly Gutfeld, FOX, Walter Scott Case

Anti-Counter Framing

The third subframe identified was the anti-counter framing subframe and was almost exclusively seen on FOX. Under this subframe, guests that expressed or started to express counter-framing were silenced in the form of the pundit “running out of time” and not being able to continue the dialog. For example, when speaking about Garner’s death on FOX News, Brian Benjamin, a Democratic strategist, tried to focus on the fact that the officer was using an illegal chokehold. Immediately after he started the dialog, Baier cuts the discourse and moves on to the next story. The same thing was done to Alan Colmes, a guest on FOX. He tried to explain why we continue to see officers killing Black Americans but was interrupted because they “had a hard break”. Although this was an issue that was overwhelmingly seen in FOX, there was one instance where MSNBC also cut off a guest. Lewis Reed was speaking on the responsibility that media plays in the oppression of Black people because of the way media frames Black communities however, he was interrupted so the network could go on break. This timing paired with the scolding they were receiving from a guest could mean that the network was not ready to hear how they contribute to systemic issues in the country.

Counter Framing

Within counter framing, three main subframes were detected: devictimizing the officer, humanizing the victim, and acknowledging systemic issues.

Devictimizing the officer

Normally an officer was devictimized when pundits and guests mentioned how the officer did not act as they were trained, and their wrongdoings and inconsistencies were highlighted. They were further devictimized when it was explicitly stated that the officers murdered the victim. This subframe directly counters the self-proclaimed morality of whiteness and the victimizing officer subframe found in the pro-white frame. This was present in both networks, although the frame was only mentioned by guests on FOX News and not by the pundits who appear regularly on the network:

Well, police are trained to handle any and all scenarios without using lethal force. They could have -- they had already tased the young man. - Michael McClanahan, MSNBC, Alton Sterling Case

He murdered the man. The police officer murdered this man, and that is a fact. – Tamara Holder, FOX, Eric Garner Case

But before he is wrestled to the ground, one of the officers appears to be putting him in a choke hold, a maneuver that was banned by the New York Police Department in 1993, because choke holds can cut off the flow of blood and oxygen to the brain and have been blamed in the death of suspects. – Chris Hayes, MSNBC, Eric Garner Case

Humanizing the Victim

The text was coded has humanizing the victim whenever pundits or guests brought up that these victims were brutally murdered, had a family, was loved by the community, or had a bright future ahead of them. Once more, this frame was present in FOX and MSNBC transcripts although the frame was only mentioned when a guest on FOX spoke on it:

You know, Michael Vick was put in jail for dogs fighting. Michael Brown was killed (ph) worse than a dog. It's just not right. It's not fair. – Rev. Jesse Jackson, FOX, Michael Brown Case

He was a 12-year-old boy. And his mother and his father and his family is in agony right now because this little boy -- boy, not man -- African-American boy, and too often in this country, young African-American males do not get the privilege of being able to grow up. – Nina Turner, MSNBC, Tamir Rice Case

Terence Crutcher was 40 years old and the father of four. – Chris Hayes, MSNBC, Terence Crutcher Case

While humanizing the victim helps viewers realize how wrong the officers were in murdering the victims, there were times when pundits and guest comments imply that the victims did not deserve to die because they were “good Blacks” instead of the killings being wrong whether the victims were innocent or not:

He was called by a lot of people, I understand, Lesley, a gentle giant. -Al Sharpton, MSNBC Michael Brown Case

We are kind of a big family. We come from a great background. A great background. A southern background and we were raised with respect. – Elisha Garner, MSNBC, Eric Garner Case

We`re talking about an individual that suffered a brain injury. That`s when she says TBI. that`s traumatic brain injury. I grew up with this family. Mr. Scott`s mother worked with my auntie at a health care facility. Mr. Scott`s twin sisters took care of my grandfather when he was dying of cancer. So he comes from a care-taking, health-providing family. – Colette Forrest, MSNBC, Keith Scott Case

Pointing Out Systemic Problems

The final subframe is pointing out systemic issues. Within this subframe law enforcement as an institution is called into question and critiqued, whether it is through calling out policing culture, pointing out the patterns that have repeated themselves over the years, or the hypocrisy of policing as a whole:

But there is a way in which black lives, especially the lives of young black men, are devalued in this country, you know, in a chronic way that has been happening since before the birth of the republic. It`s been there. And we have not solved that. – Eugene Robinson, MSNBC, Alton Sterling Case

There`s a history with police and their racist brutality and their militarized force and how they`ve been treating us in St. Paul and Minneapolis for years. And so, this is nothing new. Even in the suburbs, we`ve never been welcome out in the suburbs, we`ve always been profiled and pulled over, and all of those things that happened to us, but just driving, just being normal human beings, just citizens in the world. -Danny Given, MSNBC, Philando Castile Case

We've seen incidences of open carry advocates carrying not just hand guns but long guns, dangerous looking AR-15 rifles in full view of police and nothing happens, walking through Walmart, walking through stores, walking through restaurants, terrifying the people who are patrons. Someone calls 911. Nothing happens to the person. But police officers implying that an African-American, a black man or even a child who has what they think looks like a gun, they feel they have the right to shoot him. – Joy Reid, MSNBC, Keith Scott Case

This subframe was almost exclusively seen in MSNBC reports; however, two guests on FOX did exhibit it:

In many respects. That happens often in St. Louis. These young men are taken out of their cars. They're put in handcuffs and they're set on the side of the road. And most of the time, they haven't done anything. – Freeman Bosley, FOX, Michael Brown Case

Well, here in Chicago, for example, in Laquan McDonald case, one man was indicted, seven, eight police saw it and filed false reports. They're still in the police department. That's the kind of pattern. – Jesse Jackson, FOX, Alton Sterling Case

Institutional Trust Frame

An emerging theme amongst the news transcripts was an expressed trust in the justice system.

Under this frame, there are three subframes; denial of systemic issues, hope for change and justice, and simplistic fixes.

Denial of Systemic Issues

The first subframe within this frame is the denial of systemic issues. This manifested in a few ways: rejecting statistics and rejecting racial patterns. This subframe was seen on both networks but was overwhelmingly seen on FOX:

Fact is humans lump unique acts together if it suits them. Meaning, no matter how different Tulsa was from Charlotte, it's easy to form a theme out of both making it less complex and more black and white, even if a police officer and victim happens to be black. – Greg Gutfeld, FOX, Terence Crutcher Case

Of course, it is reason for concern. I'm not going to debate that fact. But what I am saying is that one person's action does not necessarily represent the whole of the department. Have there been mistakes made in of course there have. – Charlie Dooley, MSNBC, Michael Brown Case

This is the progressive impulse. Every single police killing is documented. We understand all of the details of every police killing. But what we don't need is to have the argument made that there is a systemic problem when the evidence shows that there are other problems that progressives don't care about. – Horace Cooper, FOX, Walter Scott Case

Well, we're certainly seeing more of them. And like every plane crash, you think that it's happening a lot more frequently than it might be. – Mark Eiglarsh, FOX, Philando Castile Case

Denial of systemic issues feeds into the idea that everything is fair, equal, and just (Wilkins and Wenger 2014) but if someone were to acknowledge systemic issues, they would also have to acknowledge that the U.S is not equal in its opportunity (Figueroa 2020). They would also have to acknowledge how they themselves contribute to the issues marginalized groups face. Instead of grappling with this reality, it is easier to ignore systemic issues. In the case of this study, it is easier to write off cases where Black people are murdered by law enforcement as individual instances instead of connecting the cases and realizing that there is a larger problem at hand.

Hope for Change and Justice

The second subframe within this frame is hope for change and justice. While hope and a call for justice is not inherently a bad thing, this indicates institutional trust as there is an assumption that the justice system is unbiased, “colorblind” and will see the cases for what they are, a cop wrongfully killing a citizen. This viewpoint fails to acknowledge that the justice system is built to favor white Americans, making such justice unlikely. They also expected these deaths to spark change in the system. This subframe was frequently used by MSNBC although, a few guests on FOX News used the subframe as well:

We don't know what the situation is. And he had to use deadly force. Give that police officer the chance, at least give his side of the story. But at the same time we have to worry about and we have to look at Michael Brown. He too is, you know, has laws and he too has rights. So, we have to look at both sides of the equation, guys. –Rod Wheeler, FOX, Michael Brown Case

But what this officer did disgraces each and every one of those men and women. And I am hopeful and prayerful that the justice system will work as I know it can. –Justin Bamberg, MSNBC, Walter Scott Case

And I know the St. Louis County Police Department's doing a very thorough investigation. They're going to interview everybody. They're going to look at the ballistics. They're going to look at the gunshot wounds. And they're going to come to a conclusion and present their findings to the St. Louis County prosecuting attorney. And at that point we will have a final decision. -Jesse Jackson, FOX, Michael Brown Case

Simplistic Fixes

When pundits and guests talked about potential fixes for systemic injustices, they would suggest that law enforcement simply make these officers follow the law. The problem with these suggested fixes is that it implies that the system should stop working as intended. This subframe was exclusively seen in MSNBC transcripts:

We`re around the country fighting gun violence. We`re telling young people to do the right thing. Well, we have also got to make law enforcement do the right thing. -Al Sharpton, MSNBC Eric Garner Case

And I think that if we start seeing police having to be subjected to abiding by the law or paying a penalty for it, it would help us get into a training and cultural mode.- Al Sharpton, MSNBC, Philando Castile

...at the end of the day, in my view, the only way that this behavior will change is if there`s criminal accountability at the end of the day when an officer engages in the use of force that is excessive and someone dies.- Hakeem Jeffries, MSNBC, Tamir Rice

In this century, we are dealing with a form of racial violence called misconduct, we can bring this to an end, but we`ve got to do so by using our political power, using our economic power, turning out at the polls and enacting legislative reform, policy reform, at the municipal level, the state level, and the federal level. – Cornell Brooks MSNBC, Philando Castile Case

FOX News and MSNBC differ ideologically meaning that they are bound to have some differences in the way they cover cases in which Black people are killed by law enforcement. This was shown in how FOX News and MSNBC framed the victims and officers involved in these cases however, because they are both U.S institutions they operate under the white racial

frame. This means they both exhibit anti-black and pro-white framing. FOX News did exhibit more anti-black and pro-white frames within their reports however, these frames were still present in MSNBC, even though they are considered the liberal network. Counter framing was only present on FOX News when a guest spoke on it and was never presented by a pundit on the network. In addition, many of the guests that begin to express counter framing on FOX News were interrupted by the pundits. Although counter framing was presented by both pundits and guests on MSNBC, there were times in which their counter frame still affirmed anti-black and pro-white sentiments.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

In this study, I sought to analyze how the most partisan cable news networks, FOX News and MSNBC, promoted the white racial frame and its subframes in its coverage of cases where Black victims were murdered by law enforcement. I also investigated if both of these news networks presented a counter frame and discussed systemic racism. Through inductively analyzing how racial attitudes, ideologies, narratives, and racialized emotions were present through descriptions, phrases, and word choices (Lane et al. 2020:797) the white racial frame and other frames became salient.

Overall, the results show that there are differences in the ways these two networks present and frame these cases, but they are the same in that they still exhibit the white racial frame which is meant to bolster white supremacy and reinforce the racial hierarchy. Consistent with Feagin's white racial frame, which is characterized by its emphasis on whiteness as virtuous, civilized, and morally correct and blackness as criminal and threatening (Feagin 2020), I found news networks exhibited the anti-black and pro-white frames. The anti-black frame was present in cable news through criminalizing the victim and blaming the Black community for Black peoples' position in society. Victims were criminalized when pundits and guests brought up their criminal records, blamed them for their death, and mentioned stereotypical characteristics they held which was done to further link them to blackness and criminality. While FOX and MSNBC both exhibited the anti-black frame, they were not to the same degree. MSNBC would counter anti-black frames with another frame, but FOX News would double down on anti-black narratives by spouting more anti-black rhetoric, showcasing how much the network adheres to the anti-black frame.

The pro-white frame was present in cable news through victimizing the officer, general colorblind thinking, and anti-counter framing behavior. Officers were often victimized when the networks talked about how hard policing was, proclaiming that not all cops are bad, and humanizing the officers. FOX seemed to be the main offender of the victimization of the officer subframe however, this subframe was not absent in MSNBC reports. At one point this narrative was spouted by a clip shown on air in which they utilized the voice of a Black man to affirm a pro-white view. The few bad apples subframe was perpetuated on both FOX and MSNBC across cases with similar severity. Both networks believed that it is just a few bad cops killing Black men. This framing is used to defend policing as an institution and redirects any criticism law enforcement would get back to one bad individual. Systemic issues do not end if you are not addressing and reworking the entire institution and this “bad apple mindset” precludes the urgency for such drastic changes to take place.

To increase sympathy for the officers involved, networks humanized them by mentioning that they had a family, were a veteran, or were afraid for their lives. The colorblind thinking and anti-counter framing subframes almost exclusively appeared in the FOX reports. Pundits and guests tried to defend officers by proclaiming that they were not racist. To prevent counter framing from being discussed on the network by guests, pundits on FOX would interrupt them by talking about other news or going to break. This pattern was exclusive to FOX but there was one instance where MSNBC also cut off a guest when said guest talked about the ways in which news sources perpetuate negative narratives of Black communities. This anti-counter framing behavior found within networks is related to Mueller’s Racial Ignorance theory which discusses how white dominance is maintained by white people remaining racially unaware (Mueller 2020). To do so, they must evade and ignore the knowledge that may harm their position in society. In

the case of cable news networks, they must prevent counter frames from presenting themselves as that aids in dismantling white supremacy.

Counter framing appeared in cable news through devictimizing the officer, humanizing the victim, and acknowledging systemic issues. Officers were mainly devictimized through pundits and guests discussing how they were wrong in killing the victim and did not follow police training. Although this was a subframe normally displayed on MSNBC, there were a few times in which FOX guests made this subframe salient. This pattern was also seen in humanizing the victim subframe, which is characterized by the discussion of how the victims were brutally murdered, had a family, were loved by the community, or had a bright future ahead of them. Humanizing the victim does help viewers generate sympathy for the victims although there were times in which humanizing came off as projecting whiteness onto the victims and distancing them from perceived blackness. This was done by saying the victims came from good families, had a great background, were innocent, and gentle. The pointing out systemic issues subframe was seen when guests and pundits brought up issues with police culture and pointed out systemic patterns. Once again, this subframe was almost exclusively seen on MSNBC but when it was mentioned on FOX, it was by guests on the network and not by the pundits themselves.

The final frame that was present in all news networks evenly is the institutional trust frame which consisted of the denial of systemic issues, hope for change and justice, and simplistic fixes. Guests and pundits on both networks denied systemic issues by disregarding patterns and statistics although this was mainly seen on FOX News. The hope for change and justice subframe came from both networks evenly in the form of saying there will be an objective investigation. The final subframe, simplistic fixes, was strictly seen in MSNBC. Pundits and guests would simply state that the justice system needs to make sure that officers follow the law

like everyone else. Alas, we know that will not happen as the justice system is made to protect white supremacy.

Implications

The purpose of this study is not to attack pundits and guests on these networks (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). Such attacks are unnecessary because individual people are not needed for stereotypical images and racism to exist within society and in these institutions (Carter and Lippard 2020; Bonilla-Silva 2006). This study simply aims to showcase the ways in which cable news networks perpetuate the white racial frame in cases where Black victims are murdered by law enforcement. In addition, this study aimed to investigate how systemic racism was discussed in the network's reports. Such an investigation was needed as cable news networks are seen as social authorities and have the power to create, produce, and spread negative narratives and images of marginalized groups (Lane et al. 2020; Abraham and Appiah 2006). These networks need to understand the power they yield when they choose to demonize these victims and protect officers in these cases because the way they frame them could reproduce racism and stereotypical imagery among citizens.

As researchers suggest, the way these cases are reported by both FOX News and MSNBC are dangerous as they help spread this negative narrative of victims and protect officers and law enforcement. This raises the question of what responsibility should the networks take to ensure they do not continue perpetuating the white racial frame. For one, bringing up the victim's criminal record, stereotypical characteristics and other information of the sorts are irrelevant and can be omitted from the reports. As Smiley and Fakunle (2016) perfectly question "how necessary was it that the audience knew Eric Garner was 6'3, 400 pounds?" Pundits should not forgo objective, fact-based reporting to appease their majority white audience nor should they

repeat the information provide to them by the same police departments that employ the officers that killed these victims (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). This unnecessary racialized language and irrelevant information only serves to demonize and criminalize these victims and shifts attention away from the officers who murdered these victims (Smiley and Fakunle 2016; Legal Information Institute n.d). This information should be omitted from reports altogether if they wish to remain objective in their reports, practice journalistic integrity, and stop perpetuating the white racial frame on their network.

These networks are not the only organizations that should be working towards fairness in reporting. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has the power to ensure that these networks remain fair and objective. The Fairness Doctrine was enacted by the FCC in 1949 to ensure that holders of broadcasting licenses reported on controversial issues in an equal and honest way (Stefon 2021). This was enacted as it was shown that news broadcasters were in a position of power because they could control what their audiences see and hear (CEE Video Channel 2013; Hall et al. 1978). This means these networks could successfully shape the opinions of their audience. The Fairness Doctrine was repealed as it was believed that the doctrine infringed on free speech of these networks (Ruane 2011). The repeal of this doctrine has made it possible for networks to report on news in a very one-sided way. The way these networks cover these cases need to be regulated in some way and reworking, reinstating, and enforcing the Fairness Doctrine could be a great place to start.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study revealed many interesting frames and themes within cable news network reports, this study is not without its limitations. Words are not the only way networks shape the opinions for viewers. Abraham and Appiah (2006) found that images strengthen

participants ability to associate social issues with Black people, implying that images can also perpetuate racial stereotypes. Because news transcripts were the only source coded in the current study, we are missing the visual images that were paired with the reports which could be used to help strengthen the anti-black and pro-white frames. Not having the visuals of the broadcasted reports also means we are missing the race of the pundits and guests that speak on these issues. We could be missing instances where these networks weaponize and tokenize the voices of Black people, as seen earlier in the case of MSNBC utilizing the voice of Obama to affirm the hard job theme. Future studies should implement visual coding as well as account for the races of the individuals speaking on these issues.

This study was limited to analyzing the officers and the victims involved in these cases, but the transcripts also discussed the protests that developed after the killings. There have been numerous studies that have analyzed the protest paradigm by focusing on how protests were covered in written articles and cable news (Leopold and Bell 2017; Weaver and Scacco 2013) but a comparison of how partisan cable news networks cover these protests and how they promote anti-black and pro-white frames would be interesting to analyze as well.

Emergent themes such as the “good Black” concept seem to be a point of interest, especially for activists. It was found that MSNBC tended to humanize Black victims by trying to connect victims to whiteness and erasing blackness. This phenomenon should be studied further as this is not only a problem with MSNBC but a narrative that many other Americans adhere to. Keiajah Brooks, a Kansas City activist, started a hashtag “hood niggas are people too” (Brooks 2021) to remind people that you do not have to be perceived as “normal”, “moral” or other adjectives often linked to whiteness to be treated like a human deserving of life. Looking into how this movement has been received by Americans, understanding how it disrupts the good

Black narrative, and how it adds economic inequalities to the discussion of racial inequalities would be interesting.

Further looking into the nuance of the emergent institutional trust frame is also critical to understanding America's relationship with law enforcement and the ways in which it operates for white supremacy. Finally, the anti-counter framing subframe is related to Mueller's (2020) Theory of Racial Ignorance which includes knowledge evasion. Knowledge evasion aids in white ignorance which reinforces white domination (Mueller 2020). Future studies should look into how cable news networks continue to maintain said racial ignorance beyond anti-counter framing behavior. Studies should also investigate how the tenets of Mueller's theory emerge in their reports.

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to showcase the ways in which partisan cable news networks perpetuate the white racial frame and its anti-black and pro-white subframes. A secondary goal was to investigate how these networks discussed systemic racism within their reports. The findings suggest that both networks exhibit these frames although they differ in frequency and severity. FOX news exhibited more anti-black and pro-white rhetoric although these sediments were also expressed on MSNBC. Results also revealed that even though MSNBC is labeled as a liberal network and exhibited counter framing within their reports, they still perpetuated the anti-black and pro-white frames. Counter framing was only present on FOX when brought up by guests on the network and when they begin to convey counter framing, they were shut down by pundits. Guests from both networks and pundits on MSNBC also believed that the same institutions that allowed the killings to take place were the same institutions that would bring justice to the victims.

The results from this study have implications for these networks as well as policy implications for the FCC. It is time for these networks to take a step back and see how they perpetuate and uphold racist ideology and stereotypical images within society. This will allow them to see how they could improve on their coverage of not only cases where Black people are murder by law enforcement but other stories as well. Forces external to these networks like the FCC should implement and enforce policies like the Fairness Doctrine to help regulate how these networks report on these serious and sensitive cases. They must hold these networks to a higher standard and make it common practice to report on these cases in a way that encourages objectivity and journalistic integrity. In doing so, they will make sure that the viewers of these

networks are presented with a frame different from the one that is commonly perpetuated within American society.

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