

June 2018

Assailants or Saints?: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Depictions on a Social Media Based City News Website

Thomas R. Hochschild Jr.
Valdosta State University, Trhochschild@valdosta.edu

Lorna Alvarez-Rivera
Valdosta State University, llalvarezrivera@valdosta.edu

Rikki Hightower
Valdosta State University, rthightower@valdosta.edu

Alison Zeaser
Valdosta State University, aazeaser@valdosta.edu

Taylor Prain
Valdosta State University, thprain@valdosta.edu

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jpps>

Recommended Citation

Hochschild, Thomas R. Jr.; Alvarez-Rivera, Lorna; Hightower, Rikki; Zeaser, Alison; Prain, Taylor; and Lewis, Ra'Shone (2018) "Assailants or Saints?: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Depictions on a Social Media Based City News Website," *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jpps/vol10/iss2/5>

This Refereed Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Assailants or Saints?: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Depictions on a Social Media Based City News Website

Cover Page Footnote

1) In line with previous research in the 'thin slices' person perception literature, we use the term 'target' to discuss photographed individuals (Hochschild & Borch, 2011; Kenny, 1994).

Authors

Thomas R. Hochschild Jr., Lorna Alvarez-Rivera, Rikki Hightower, Alison Zeaser, Taylor Prain, and Ra'Shone Lewis

Introduction

Social scientists have long been interested in the relationship between mass media and society. Max Weber believed that the media reflects the ‘cultural temperature’ of society, and called for a large-scale content analysis of the press at the first meeting of the German Sociological Society in 1910 (Hansen et al., 1998). Media, in its many forms, can both reflect and shape the collective consciousness of a society. Ideologies, cultural trends, and product endorsements are transmitted through media outlets, and are either accepted, challenged, or ignored by media consumers.

Media representations of particular demographic groups are significant because these representations can shape how group members view themselves, and how non-members perceive the group (Hall, 1997). Consistently negative portrayals of a group can lead to self-loathing and the internalization of guilt for various social problems (hooks, 1992). Conversely, groups portrayed in a positive light can develop feelings of superiority and solidarity as they blame other groups for social problems. This blame can then be used to justify various forms of out-group oppression (Collins, 2004).

News organizations have significant power to characterize certain groups positively or negatively. Indeed, 88% of Americans report that they receive news from a news organization such as a newspaper, TV newscast, website, or newswire (American Press Institute, 2014). Through story selection, framing, and source selection, news producers can portray members of certain demographic groups positively as heroic, intelligent, creative, or compassionate. Or, depictions can be negative so that certain groups are portrayed as violent, untrustworthy, incompetent, or lazy.

In the U.S., news organizations rely heavily on stories about street crime to boost ratings and advertising revenue (Beale, 2006). These stories garner significant attention because they elevate perceptions of risk, and fear of victimization (Callanan, 2012; Glassner, 2009; Heath, 1984; Liska and Baccaglioni, 1990). U.S. news organizations capitalize on this fear as stories pertaining to crime typically account for 13%-25% of newspaper and television news content (Surette, 2011). However, this massive coverage of street crime contradicts the data, which shows that crime rates in the U.S. have declined considerably since the early 1990's (Lofstrom & Raphael, 2016).

Racial and ethnic groups may be over-represented or under-represented as criminals in the news relative to actual arrest rates. For example, the FBI's Uniform Crime Report indicates that Whites consistently account for approximately 69% of the total number of arrests for all chargeable offenses, while Blacks account for approximately 28% (see FBI UCR Publications 1995-2015). American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander account for approximately 2.5% of arrests, while Hispanics and Latinos constitute 18% of those arrested. However, research indicates that print and television news consistently over-represents Blacks, Hispanics, and Latinos as criminals (e.g., Bjornstrom et al., 2010; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Color of Change, 2015; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Oliver, 2003). Conversely, Whites are more likely to be portrayed as police officers, judges, reporters, news anchors, or victims in news programs (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Dixon et al., 2003; Dixon, 2015; Gilliam et al., 1996; Oliver, 2003).

News organizations also contribute to negative stereotypes when they use mugshots of those accused or convicted of a crime. The long-lasting stigma that accompanies a news mugshot

can be devastating – even when the alleged perpetrator is found not guilty (Lashmar, 2013). For many news consumers, a criminal mugshot automatically insinuates guilt and moral inferiority (Fahrny, 2014; Lain, 1986). People who have their mugshot photo taken often exhibit faces of despair, disheveled hair, or are wearing jail jump suits, all of which contribute to perceptions of guilt.

Further contributing to the demonization of Blacks, Hispanics, and Latinos is the fact that news organizations neglect discussions of the sociological correlates of crime. Instead, news consumers are presented with simplified characterizations of ‘bad people’ doing ‘bad things.’ This common news practice of insinuating guilt by de-sociologizing crime reduces public understanding and empathy for those accused of crimes, making it easier to rebuke and punish them. Additionally, de-sociologizing crime shifts the onus for social problems correlated with crime from society to the individual. Some of these crime correlates include failing schools, neighborhood condition, the availability of illegal drugs, poverty, inequality, unemployment, and a lack of collective neighborhood efficacy (DeLisi & Vaughn, 2016; Ellis et al., 2009; Fajnzylber et al., 2002; Hsieh & Pugh, 1993; Pratt & Cullin, 2005; Sampson et al., 1997).

Scapegoat and Racial Threat Theories

Several leading theoretical perspectives offer insight as to why certain racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented as criminals in the news media. Scapegoat and racial threat theories focus on conflict and power to understand why certain groups endure various forms of social persecution. According to the *scapegoat theory* of intergroup conflict, any group in power has social, economic, and political incentives to blame other groups for various social problems (Hammer, 2007). The primary incentive is to justify disparities in group power. Economic inequality, disproportionate political representation, disparities in educational and health

outcomes, and differential incarceration rates can be maintained if a group in power can use the media to convince others that less powerful groups are blameworthy for their plight. Less powerful groups may be depicted as unintelligent, lazy, weak, or lacking in moral character. This group suppression can be based on race, ethnicity, gender, social class, disability, sexual orientation, age, or any other meaningful social characteristic.

Racial threat theory also focuses on conflict but maintains that race and ethnicity are the primary determinants of social persecution (Dollar, 2014). Racial threat theory contends that an increase in the population of a racial or ethnic minority group leads to fear on behalf of the majority group. This fear stems from the possibility that the emerging group will usurp economic, political, and cultural power. Consequently, the majority group responds with heightened social control and targeted persecution of the minority group. Historically, Whites have held this power in the U.S. and have galvanized when other groups are perceived to threaten these forms of power. Whites have used institutional apparatus to blame non-Whites for social problems such as unemployment, poverty, the prevalence of drugs and violence, the corruption of youth, overpopulation, terrorism, and a perceived decline in morality (e.g., Alexander, 2010; Blackmon, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bosworth and Flavin, 2007; Bowman, 2014; Haney-López, 2014; Hochschild, 2016; Kimmel, 2013; Zinn, 2005). These campaigns have resulted in rigorous racialized practices that have protected Whites' power and privilege.

Scapegoat and racial threat theorists argue that federal and state legislatures, the criminal justice system, and the news media are institutional tools used by Whites to maintain power. Biased laws, discriminatory police practices, unjust court systems, ineffectual corrections systems, and prejudiced news producers ensure that a steady and disproportionate flow of non-Whites are available as news media spectacle. For Whites, these news portrayals result in

sentiments of in-group superiority and solidarity as they condemn the deviant behaviors and criminals presented by news producers. Simultaneously, Whites absolve themselves of feelings of responsibility or guilt for their role in creating and perpetuating social problems correlated with criminal behavior. For non-Whites, the ceaseless news spectacle of dark-skinned criminal images can result in the internalization of White supremacist ideology, self-blame, and self-loathing (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1992).

Power Structure and Market Share Theories

Power structure and market share theories focus on the ideologies and relative economic power of those who produce and consume news. According to the *power structure* perspective, news stories are selected based on the worldview of those who control media content (Van Dijk, 1995). Because the vast majority of print and television media has been controlled by affluent White Christian heterosexual able-bodied males, they have been more likely to portray themselves in a positive light. Innumerable portrayals of heroic, intelligent, strong, expert White men have saturated the U.S. and global marketplace. Conversely, people who do not meet these criteria are more likely to be portrayed in a negative or less-than-flattering light (e.g., Heider, 2000; Ibrahim & Halim, 2013; Klein & Naccarato, 2003; Moody, 2012; Poindexter al., 2003; Sanchez, 2012).

Power structure theory maintains that news producers often import personal biases into their work which may be based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, political ideology, or economic philosophy. These biases can affect story selection, media framing, and source selection. News producers' decisions may be a conscious attempt to promote in-group interests or preferred ideologies. Or, decisions may be unconscious so that reporters, editors, and producers are not cognizant that the stories they tell marginalize others (Heider,

2000). In either case, the demographic composition of the media power structure ensures the widespread dissemination of news producers' ideological interests.

The *market share* perspective makes a different argument about what drives story selection. Due to intense competition among news organizations for market share, media staff experience pressure to focus on stories that draw news consumers (Chermak, 1994; Sheley and Ashkins, 1981). Stories that appeal to predominant ideologies of the target audience, or that are sensationalistic, are more likely to draw and keep news consumers. For example, conservative news consumers are more likely to read and support newspapers that provide a conservative perspective. The *market share* perspective maintains that economic profit, rather than ideological interests or accurate representations of the world, is the primary driver of news decisions.

Because White Christians are the largest racial and religious groups in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2015a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), news producers have a financial incentive to appeal to this demographic by satiating their demand for positive in-group portrayals and negative out-group portrayals. Positive news portrayals of Whites increases viewership and readership, which results in increased advertising revenue and larger profits. These news consumers are also appeased when notions of in-group superiority are supported by stereotypes of other groups as unintelligent, lazy, or violent.

Methods

For this study, we emulate the content analysis research approach of Dixon and colleagues (2015, 2003, 2000a, 2000b), as well as others (Gilliam et al., 1996; Heider, 2000; Ibrahim & Halim, 2013; Klein & Naccarato, 2003; Moody, 2012; Oliver, 2003; Poindexter al., 2003; Sanchez, 2012), to ascertain whether an online-only social media based city news organization in the Southeastern U.S. portrays people differently depending on their race,

ethnicity, or gender. While scholars have paid considerable attention to these portrayals in traditional broadcast news and print media, little attention has been paid to online-only news websites and social media based news. This lack of attention is unfortunate considering the enormous growth and popularity of online-only newspapers and social media (see Pew Research Center, 2015b, 2016). Social media platforms have also changed the way people receive news, with 62% of U.S. adults now getting their news from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Vine (Pew Research Center, 2016b).

The news organization we analyzed is an online-only city news source that provides hometown news, national news, and editorial pieces about social, political, and economic issues. We selected this hometown news source because it publishes numerous stories about local crime, philanthropy, and civic awards. For the sake of anonymity, we are using a pseudonym and referring to the news outlet as '*CityWeb*.' *CityWeb* is a relatively new alternative to the city's one print newspaper. Over 20,000 people have 'liked' *CityWeb* on Facebook, and consequently receive news feeds from this social media platform. Over 3,000 others get news updates by following *CityWeb* on Twitter. The news website's first edition appeared February 1, 2013. All of their news stories are archived by month and can be viewed on their website for free.

Altogether, we examined 8,142 stories ranging from February 2013 to May 2016.

The news organization is located in a metropolitan statistical area in a Southeastern state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) the city has a total population of 54,518. For people who claim one racial category, 51.1% of the city's population is Black or African-American, 43.3% is White, 1.7% is Asian, and .3 American Indian or Alaskan Native. 4.0% of the city's population is Hispanic or Latino of any race. While a majority of the city's residents are Black,

the county is predominantly White. Out of 109,223 inhabitants 58.1% are White, 35.8% are Black or African-American, 1.5% are Asian, and .4% are Native American. Individuals of Latino or Hispanic origin make up 4.8% of the population.

According to their website, most of *CityWeb*'s staff were White during the course of our analysis, including a White male Editorial Director, a White male Editor-in-Chief, two White male opinion contributors, a White female General Manager, a White male Operations Manager, a White female in charge of the community calendar, and a White male in charge of sports features. One Black male reporter was added to the *CityWeb* roster months after it started publishing stories, but none of his stories included photographs for this analysis.

The six authors/coders for this study are demographically diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and age, which was helpful while determining the race or ethnicity of photographed individuals, whom we refer to as 'targets.'¹ Our independent variables are 'race/ethnicity' and 'gender.' Our four dependent variables are 'criminal mugshot,' 'race/ethnicity mentioned in text,' 'philanthropy photo,' and 'award photo.' We present our data as frequency distributions in tables below.

For representations of 'criminality' we were interested in two primary variables. The first is whether *CityWeb* used a mugshot of individuals arrested or convicted of a crime. Based on the aforementioned theories and previous research, we wanted to ascertain whether *CityWeb* was more or less likely to use mugshot photographs for certain racial or ethnic groups. Even though the majority of targets in our study had not been found guilty at the time the story was published, mugshots accompanied many of their stories. News organizations want their stories to appear current, and rarely wait until suspects have been found guilty or not guilty before running a story.

CityWeb frames all of the mugshots within a standardized blue and purple background, making it easy for regular readers to instantly recognize that the story pertains to crime.

Our second criminality variable pertains to whether *CityWeb* mentioned the race or ethnicity of the alleged criminal in the text of the story. In some instances, *CityWeb* did not use a photograph, but mentioned the race and gender of the person suspected, arrested, or convicted of a crime. While it has become the industry standard to avoid using racial or ethnic identifiers unless they are essential to the story, *CityWeb* used these identifiers in 140 stories.

While the majority of crime stories pertained to *CityWeb*'s geographical region, it also reported on crimes in other parts of the country. It was clear that these stories were selected because the suspect was accused of a bizarre crime, or because he or she looked unusual in the mugshot. Some of these stories include a woman smuggling drugs inside burritos, a man who had sex with a goat, a weed dealer wearing a beard on only one side of his face, and a man who called 911 because his mom smoked all their methamphetamine. These sensationalistic stories were clear attempts to arouse interest in the news website. Because *CityWeb* cherry-picked numerous crime stories from across the country, we believe that it is empirically sound to compare criminal representations on the website to national crime statistics.

Our third variable pertains to 'philanthropy photo.' In order for a target to be coded as a philanthropist, they had to either be performing community service outside the normal parameters of their job, or had to be donating money to a pro-social cause. While some of the targets donated money as individuals, most donated as part of a business or other organization. Some of the photographs that met our philanthropy criteria featured people in the act of performing community service. Other photos featured a representative of an organization

handing an over-sized check to a representative of a pro-social organization. There were no stories about philanthropy that mentioned race or ethnicity in the text of the story.

Our fourth variable is non-sports ‘award photo’. For the purposes of this study, the award had to pertain to business, academics, or a civic achievement. These types of awards connote upstanding character and positive social impact in the community. We excluded sports awards because we are not interested in recognition based on physical prowess in the athletic domain. Many award photographs featured a representative of an organization handing over a plaque, trophy, medal or ribbon to the recipient. There were no stories about an award that mentioned race or ethnicity in the text of the story.

Data

Criminality

As shown in Table 1, *CityWeb* was more likely to use mugshots for Black males than for any other demographic group, with 207 out of 476 total mugshot photos. Black males represent 43.5% of all of the mugshot photographs on the news website from February 2013 to May 2016. There were 148 mugshot photos of White males (31.1%), 70 White females (14.7%), 28 Black females (5.9%), 17 Hispanic males (3.6%), 3 Hispanic females (0.6%), and 3 Asian males (0.6%). This finding is in line with previous research, which demonstrates that Black males are far more likely to be portrayed as criminals than any other demographic group (e.g., Color of Change, 2015; Dixon and Linz, 2000a).

Table 1. Criminal Frequency Distributions by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Race/Ethnicity and Gender	Criminal Mugshot	Race/Ethnicity Mentioned in Text	Total
Black Male	207 (43.5%)	90 (64.3%)	297 (48.2%)
Black Female	28 (5.9%)	4 (2.9%)	32 (5.2%)

White Male	148 (31.1%)	41 (29.3%)	189 (30.7%)
White Female	70 (14.7%)	3 (2.1%)	73 (11.9%)
Hispanic Male	17 (3.6%)	2 (1.4%)	19 (3.1%)
Hispanic Female	3 (.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (.5%)
Asian Male	3 (.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (.5%)
Asian Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Arab Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Arab Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	476 (100%)	140 (100%)	616 (100%)

Table 1 also reveals that when no mugshot was present, Black males were more likely to have their race mentioned than any other group. Out of 140 stories where the race of the suspect or convicted criminal was mentioned 90 (64.3%) were Black males. White males' race was mentioned 41 times (29.3%), followed by 4 Black females (2.9%), 3 White females (2.1%), and 2 Hispanic males (1.4%). These findings are also in line with previous research indicating that Black suspects are more likely than other groups to have their race mentioned in news stories (e.g., Bjornstrom et al., 2010).

When the two variables are combined there were a total of 297 (out of 616 total) stories that featured a Black male mugshot or that mentioned a Black male suspect or criminal. Altogether, 48.2% of these stories pertained to Black males. Of all crime stories 189 referred to White males (30.7%), 73 White females (11.9%), 32 Black females (5.2%), 19 Hispanic males (3.1%), 3 Hispanic females (0.5%), 3 Asian males (0.5%), 0 Asian females, 0 Arab males, and 0 Arab females.

This overrepresentation of Black male criminality was exacerbated with other types of criminal depictions. For example, *CityWeb* often used photographs from surveillance videos

when Black males were seemingly in the act of committing a crime. Additionally, *CityWeb* published numerous stories about Black male college and professional athletes who were either accused or convicted of a crime. Typically, these stories were accompanied with an action photograph of the athlete during a game. Even in courtroom photographs, Black males were disproportionately portrayed as defendants.

We also noted a tendency for *CityWeb* to exclude facial photographs when people of high status were charged or convicted of a crime. Some examples of stories without an accompanying photograph include:

- A state representative convicted of driving while under the influence of alcohol.
- A former state legislator sentenced to prison for tax fraud.
- A former state Senate candidate indicted for stealing from a charity.
- A state attorney who suffocated his daughter by leaving her in a hot car.
- A mayor (who was also the police chief) arrested for sexual solicitation.
- Several stories about bank CEOs charged with bank fraud.
- A doctor charged with his wife's murder.
- Several attorneys charged with stealing money or selling drugs.
- Several pharmacists charged with illegal distribution of pharmaceutical drugs.
- A former police chief convicted of commercial gambling and extortion.
- A police officer who killed his ex-wife and her boyfriend.
- A former local police officer indicted for sexual exploitation.
- An insurance agent caught embezzling money from clients.

Through online investigation we determined that almost all of these high-status targets were White males. Furthermore, we found that it would have been fairly easy for *CityWeb* to locate photographs of these individuals online. Rather, these alleged and convicted criminals were spared the indignity of having their photograph posted along with the news story.

It is significant to note that on *CityWeb*'s website there is a sidebar of what are referred to as 'popular posts' that scroll down along with synopses of the stories. Popular posts always feature a photograph and headline that the reader can click to access the full story. Disproportionately, mugshots of Black men dominated the 'popular post' section of the website. If these stories were indeed the most popular, perhaps determined by the number of clicks, readers were disproportionately drawn to stories of Black male criminality. Further contributing to the portrayal of Black men as criminals is the fact that *CityWeb*'s 'popular posts' often pop up on people's Facebook and Twitter feeds.

Philanthropy

As shown in Table 2, White females were far more likely to be portrayed as philanthropists than any other racial/ethnic or gender group, constituting 418 out of 723 (57.8%) total philanthropy targets. White males were the next likeliest group to be portrayed as philanthropists at 159 (22.0%), then 95 Black females (13.1%), 35 Black males (4.8%), 4 Arab females (0.6%), 3 Hispanic females (0.4%), 3 Asian males (0.4%), 2 Hispanic males (0.3%), 2 Arab males (0.3%), and 2 Asian females (0.3%). Collectively, Whites constituted 79.8% of all people portrayed as philanthropists.

Table 2. Philanthropy Frequency Distributions by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Race/Ethnicity and Gender	Philanthropy Photo
Black Male	35 (4.8%)
Black Female	95 (13.1%)

White Male	159 (22.0%)
White Female	418 (57.8%)
Hispanic Male	2 (.3%)
Hispanic Female	3 (.4%)
Asian Male	3 (.4%)
Asian Female	2 (.3%)
Arab Male	2 (.3%)
Arab Female	4 (.6%)
Total	723 (100%)

Almost all of the philanthropy photographs are staged so that the targets are smiling while donning nice outfits or community service t-shirts. With approximately 80% of the philanthropy targets being White, *CityWeb* readers are exposed to a consistent news stream of White benevolence. In contrast, many recipients of philanthropy in the photographs were Black children. Through online investigation, we discovered that the city boasts numerous Black pro-social community organizations, Black churches that perform community service, Black students at the local college who help the community in a variety of ways, and Black-owned businesses that give back to the community. These organizations and their philanthropy were rarely reported in *CityWeb*.

Awards

As shown in Table 3, White females were also most likely to be portrayed as (non-sports) award recipients. Out of 1,045 total award photographs, 476 (45.6%) were of White women. White males were the second group most likely to be portrayed as award winners at 364 (34.8%), followed by 111 Black females (10.6%), 77 Black males (7.4%), 6 Asian females (0.6%), 5 Hispanic females (.5%), 4 Asian males (0.4%), 1 Hispanic male (.1%), 1 Arab male (.1%), and 0

Arab females. Collectively, White females and males constitute 80.4% of the award winners.

Collectively, only 17 out of 1,045 (1.6%) award-winning targets were either Hispanic, Asian, or Arab.

Table 3. Award Frequency Distributions by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Race/Ethnicity and Gender	Awards
Black Male	77 (7.4%)
Black Female	111 (10.6%)
White Male	364 (34.8%)
White Female	476 (45.6 %)
Hispanic Male	1 (.01%)
Hispanic Female	5 (.5%)
Asian Male	4 (.4%)
Asian Female	6 (.6%)
Arab Male	1 (.01%)
Arab Female	0 (0%)
Total	1,045 (100%)

Like the philanthropy photographs, the award photographs typically featured smiling targets wearing professional clothing. Most award photographs featured a representative of an organization handing over a plaque, trophy, medal or ribbon to a recipient. One of the most common awards was the ‘Leading Business of the Week’ given by the local Chamber of Commerce. Other photographs featured local politicians winning awards for civic accomplishments, police representatives receiving awards for departmental service, and smiling school children winning awards for academic proficiency. Similar to depictions of philanthropy, *CityWeb* readers are exposed to a constant flow of Whites portrayed as upstanding members of the community. It may be the case that local committees in charge of determining award

worthiness are less likely to bestow awards to non-Whites. Or, it may be the case that *CityWeb* simply does not report many non-White award winners. The answers to these questions are outside the scope of this paper. Regardless of the reason, *CityWeb*'s readers consistently receive the message that non-Whites are rarely worthy of awards.

Discussion

The present research demonstrates that while technology is changing the way people consume news, racial, ethnic, and gender biases continue to affect the way various groups are portrayed in the news. Black males were disproportionately portrayed as criminals, and rarely portrayed as philanthropists or award winners. Furthermore, we discovered that website design and social media interfaces can exacerbate these biases, as *CityWeb*'s 'popular posts' feature increased the likelihood that readers would be exposed to Black male mugshots. In contrast to these negative depictions, Whites were far more likely to be portrayed as philanthropists and award winners.

Our results offer strong support for *scapegoat theory*, which states that groups with the most social, political, and economic power blame less powerful groups for various social problems. In line with *scapegoat theory*, Black males were disproportionately portrayed as responsible for crimes – especially violent crimes and the sale or use of illegal drugs. If *CityWeb* were to accurately reflect the arrest rates for all chargeable offenses, 69% of crime news stories would feature Whites, 28% would feature Blacks, and 2.5% would feature American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asians, or Pacific Islanders (see FBI UCR Publications 1995-2015). Rather, *CityWeb* featured Black males in approximately half of their crime stories.

Our data show limited support for *racial threat theory*. Hispanics have recently become the largest ethnic or racial group in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2010). Racial threat

theory suggests that Hispanics' increasing numbers makes them a threat to the White Anglo power structure. Additionally, recent socio-political debates about undocumented Mexican workers and immigration in the U.S. would suggest that White controlled news organizations would be more inclined to depict Hispanics as criminals. Rather, Hispanics were portrayed as criminals in only 3.6% of *CityWeb*'s crime stories. Racial threat theory also suggests that Blacks, as the third largest racial or ethnic group in the U.S., would be overrepresented as criminals in the news. However, only Black males were overrepresented as a criminal threat to society. Black females were portrayed as criminals in only 5.2% of crime stories, and were featured as a respectable 13.1% of philanthropists and 10.6% of award winners. It may be the case that Whites are threatened by increased Black male political power with the election of President Barack Obama, several Black male U.S. Senators, and numerous Black male U.S. Congressmen in recent years. Future research should examine whether news portrayals of Black male criminality are correlated with Black male electoral victories.

Our data provide strong support for the *power structure* perspective. Because *CityWeb*'s news and editorial content has been controlled primarily by Whites, a *power structure* approach suggests that non-Whites would be overrepresented as offenders in crime stories, and that Whites would be portrayed in the most positive news light. Despite Whites' higher arrest rates, Black males were disproportionately portrayed as criminals. Additionally, *CityWeb* often opted not to use photos when White men of high status were arrested or convicted of crimes.

The power structure perspective is also supported by the fact that Whites, especially women, were most likely to be featured in philanthropy and award stories. Despite the fact that there are many Black philanthropic organizations in the city, *CityWeb*'s staff portrayed White women as philanthropists in approximately 58% of philanthropy stories. White women were also

portrayed as non-sports award winners in approximately 46% of award stories. Although market share proponents could argue that *CityWeb*'s readers clamor for these photos of White women, the fact that there is no space limitation for online news means that *CityWeb* could have supplemented these photos with positive representations of non-Whites. Instead, *CityWeb* was either constructing or reflecting what we are calling a 'culture of White civic womanhood,' whereby White women from all walks of life are expected to be active in philanthropic and civic pursuits. Future research should examine whether other news outlets are providing accurate philanthropic and award portrayals based on gender, race, and ethnicity.

The power structure perspective is also supported by the fact that Hispanics, Asians, and Arabs were rarely portrayed in a positive light. Collectively, these groups constituted only 2.2% of philanthropists and 1.6% of award winners – well below the demographic composition of the city and county. Gerbner (1972) and Tuchman (1978) have referred to this omission of minority groups as 'symbolic annihilation.' Minority groups are often erased from the media landscape, and White Christian media consumers are presented with a false reality unreflective of our diverse society.

Ascertaining the validity of the *market share* perspective is problematic because it is difficult to determine the race, ethnicity, and gender of *CityWeb*'s online news consumers. However, we can make some assessments about the *market share* perspective based on the demographic composition of the county and city of the news site. Even though the county is 58.1% White and 35.8% Black, the city is 51.1% Black and 43.3% White. Assuming that Black news consumers prefer positive stories about Blacks, the *market share* perspective would predict that the large number of Blacks in the city would garner a greater number of positive Black stories and fewer negative Black stories. However, in addition to being portrayed as criminals in

about half of *CityWeb*'s news stories, Black males were only 4.8% of philanthropists and 7.4% of award winners. Black females were also disproportionately under-represented as philanthropists and award winners. It may be the case that *CityWeb* is not overly concerned with appealing to the Black market because Blacks have significantly lower incomes in the area, and may be less likely to purchase products advertised by *CityWeb* (U.S. Census 2015). Because we are unable to ascertain readership demographics, however, our analysis only provides limited support for the *market share* perspective.

The present analysis demonstrates the importance of intersectional approaches to understanding positive and negative group portrayals in the news media. Within racial and ethnic groups, we found considerable variation as to how men and women were portrayed. We also discovered preferential treatment for upper-class people of high status. Other social characteristics such as religion, disability, sexual orientation, citizenship status, and physical attractiveness also affect how people are portrayed in the news. As hooks (1981, 1992), Davis (1981), and Collins (2000, 2004) have noted, analyses that focus on one type of oppression invariably fall short because oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type. Within what Collins (2000:18) calls the 'matrix of domination' the news media excludes, belittles, or demonizes people based on their membership in a cross-section of marginalized groups. So, the news media may demonize Blacks, belittle women, and pity the disabled in discrete ways. However, media portrayals of Black women with disabilities entail the compounded effects of these cross-sectional portrayals. The result is what we refer to as the 'cumulative effects of othering.' In other words, the additive consequence of each negative characterization as the 'other' is greater than the discrete combination of these effects. Black women with a disability become exponentially marginalized if they are poor, a lesbian, Muslim, or lack citizenship status.

More intersectional analyses of the news media are necessary in order to understand and address the harmful cumulative effects of othering.

References

- Alexander, M. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- American Press Institute. 2014. "The Personal News Cycle: How Americans Choose to get their News." Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/personal-news-cycle/>.
- Beale, S. S. 2006. "The News Media's Influence on Criminal Justice Policy: How Market-driven News Promotes Punitiveness." *William & Mary Law Review* 48: 396-481.
- Bjornstrom, E., Kaufman R. L., Peterson, R. D., and Slater, M. D. 2010. "Race and Ethnic Representations of Lawbreakers and Victims in Crime News: A National Study of Television News." *Social Problems* 57: 269-93.
- Blackmon, D. A. 2009. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2014. *Racism Without Racists*. Lanham, MD. Oxford University Press.
- Bosworth, M. & Flavin, J. 2007. *Race, Gender, and Punishment: From Colonialism to the War on Terror*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bowman, S. W. 2014. *Color Behind Bars: Racism in the U.S. Prison System*. Santa Barbara, CA. Praeger Publishing.
- Brennan, P. K. & Vandenberg, A. L. 2009. "Depictions of Female Offenders in Front Page Newspaper Stories: The Importance of Race/Ethnicity." *International Journal of*

- Social Inquiry* 2: 141-75.
- Callanan, V. J. 2012. "Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences." *Sociological Perspectives* 55: 93-115.
- Collins, P. H. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. 2004. *Black Sexual Politics: African-Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Color of Change. 2015. "Not to be Trusted: Dangerous Levels of Inaccuracy in TV Crime Reporting in NYC." Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.colorofchange.org/images/ColorOfChangeNewsAccuracyReportCardNYC.pdf>.
- Davis, A. 1981. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York, NY: Random House.
- DeLisi, M. & Vaughn, M.G. 2016. "Correlates of Crime." In A.Q. Piquero's (Eds.) *The Handbook of Criminological Theory* (pp. 18-36). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Dixon, T. L. 2015. "Good Guys are Still Always in White?: Positive Change and Continued Misrepresentation." *Communication Research* 1-15.
- Dixon, T. L. & Linz, D. 2000a. "Overrepresentation and Underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as Lawbreakers on Television News." *Journal of Communication* 50: 131-54.
- Dixon, T. L. & Linz, D. 2000b. "Race and the Misrepresentation of Victimization on Local Television News." *Communication Research* 27: 547-73.
- Dixon, T. L., Azocar, C. L., & Casas, M. 2003. "The Portrayal of Race and Crime on Television Network News." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 47: 498-523.

- Dollar, C. B. 2014. "Racial Threat Theory: Assessing the Evidence, Requesting Redesign." *Journal of Criminology*. (July). Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <https://www.hindawi.com/archive/2014/983026/>.
- Ellis, L., Beaver, K., Wright, J. 2009. *Handbook of Crime Correlates*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Entman, R. M. 1992. "Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism and Cultural Change." *Journalism Quarterly* 69: 341-61.
- Entman, R. M. & Rojecki, A. 2000. *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*. Chicago, IL. University of Chicago Press.
- Fahrny, A. R. 2016. What's in a Mugshot?: Visual Characteristics Newspaper Media Emphasize Based on Race and Gender (Master's Thesis). Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, Kansas State University.
- Fajnzylber, P., Lederman, D., & Loayza, N. 2002. "Inequality and Violent Crime." *Journal of Law and Economics* 45(1): 1-39.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. 1995-2016. *UCR Publications*. Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/ucr-publications>
- Gerbner, G. 1972. "Violence in Television Drama: Trends and Symbolic Functions." In G. A. Comstock, & E. Rubinstein (Eds.) *Television and Social Behavior* (2nd edition, pp. 28-187). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Gilliam, F. D. & Iyengar, S. 2000. "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public." *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 560-73.
- Gilliam, F. D., Iyengar, S., Simon, A., & Wright, O. 1996. "Crime in Black and White: The Violent, Scary World of Local News." *Harvard Journal of International Press/Politics* 1:

6-23.

- Glassner, B. 2009. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Hall, S. 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Hammer, E. D. 2007. "Scapegoat Theory" in R. Baumeister and K. Voh's *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Haney-López, I. 2014. *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals have Reinvented Racism & Wrecked the Middle Class*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press
- Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R. & Newbold, C. 1998. *Mass Communication Research Methods*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Heath, L. 1984. "Impact of Newspaper Crime Reports on Fear of Crime: Multimethodological Investigation." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 47: 263-76.
- Heider, D. 2000. *White News: Why Local News Programs Don't Cover People of Color*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishing.
- Hochschild, A.R. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Hochschild Jr., T. R. & Borch, C. 2011. "About Face: The Association Between Facial Appearance and Status Attainment Among Military Personnel." *Sociological Spectrum* 31(3):369-395.
- hooks, b. 1981. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, b. 1992. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

- Hsieh, C.C. & Pugh, M.D. 1993. 'Poverty, Income Inequality, and Violent Crime: A Meta-Analysis of Recent Aggregate Data Studies.' *Criminal Justice Review* 18(2): 182–202
- Ibrahim, D. & Halim A. A. 2013. "How TV News makes Arabs and Muslims Feel About Themselves." in R.A. Lind (Eds.) *Race/Class/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, and Producers* (3rd edition, pp. 68-74). Boston, MA: Pearson Publishing.
- Kenny, D. A. 1994. *Interpersonal Perception: A Social Relations Analysis*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Kimmel, M. 2013. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New York, NY: Nation Books.
- Klein, R. D. & Naccarato, S. 2003. "Broadcast News Portrayal of Minorities: Accuracy in Reporting." *American Behavioral Scientist* 46: 1611-16.
- Lain, L. B. 1986. "Reader Perception of Newspaper Mug Shot Subjects in Photos and in Stories." Paper presented at the 69th Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in Norman, Oklahoma. (August).
- Lashmar, P. 2013. "How to Humiliate and Shame: A Reporter's Guide to the Power of the Mugshot." *Social Semiotics* 24: 56-87.
- Liska, A. E. & Baccaglini, W. 1990. "Feeling Safe by Comparison: Crime in the Newspapers." *Social Problems* 37: 360-74.
- Lofstrom, M. & Raphael, S. 2016. "Crime, the Criminal Justice System, and Socioeconomic Inequality." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30: 103-26.
- Moody, M. 2012. "From Jezebel to Ho: An Analysis of Creative and Imaginative Shared Representations of African-American Women." *Journal of Research on Women and*

Gender 4 (March) 74-94.

Oliver, M. B. 2003. "African-American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous': Implications of Media Portrayals of Crime on the 'Criminalization' of African-American Men." *Journal of African-American Studies* 7: 3-18.

Pew Research Center. 2015a. "America's Changing Religious Landscape" (May 12). Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

Pew Research Center. 2015b. "State of the News Media 2015." Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <http://www.journalism.org/files/2015/04/FINAL-STATE-OF-THE-NEWS-MEDIA1.pdf>.

Pew Research Center. 2016a. "The Modern News Consumer" (July 7). Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/>.

Pew Research Center. 2016b. "News Use Across Social Media Platforms" (May 26). Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>.

Poindexter, P. M., Smith L., & Heider, D. 2003. "Race and Ethnicity in Local Television News: Framing, Story Assignments, and Source Selections." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 47: 524-36.

Pratt, T.C. & Cullen, F.T. 2005. "Assessing Macro-Level Predictors and Theories of Crime: A Meta-Analysis." *Crime and Justice* 32: 373-450.

Sampson, R.J., Raudenbush S.W., & Earls, F. 1997. "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." *Science* 277 (5328): 918-924.

Sanchez, V. E. 2012. "Buying into Racism: American Indian Product Icons in the American Marketplace." in M.G. Carsarphen and J.P. Sanchez's (Eds.) *American Indians*

- and the Mass Media* (pp. 153-168). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Sheley, J. F. & Ashkins, C. D. 1981. "Crime, Crime News, and Crime Views" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45: 492-506.
- Surette, R. 2011. *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice* (5th edition). Stamford, CT: Cengage.
- Tuchman, G. 1978. *Making the News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Uniform Crime Report. 2014. Retrieved on 11/17/17 from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/tables/table-43>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2010. "2010 Census shows America's Diversity." Retrieved on 11/17/17 from https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn125.html.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2015. "American Community Survey." Retrieved on 11/17/17 from https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases/2015/release.html#par_textimage_11.
- Van Dijk, T. A. 1995. "Power and the News Media." *Political Communication and Action* 9-36.
- Zinn, H. 2005. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.