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Effects of the Black Lives Matter movement on media portrayals of accused criminals

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Effects of the Black Lives Matter Movement on Media Portrayals of Accused Criminals

By

Samantha N. Strine

A Thesis

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Abstract

Media impacts our everyday lives and shapes how we understand the world around us. It assists in creating social hierarchies which impact how groups of people are represented and understood. These hierarchies have led to the generation of stereotypes and disparate reporting practices in media. However, social movements tend to be created to provide evidence against these stereotypes and the movements attempt to undo disparate treatment of marginalized groups. This study had three hypotheses: Hypothesis 1 stated that prior to the generation of the Black Lives Movement, media depictions of black and white accused criminals will differ. Hypothesis 2 stated that a reduction in the degree of difference between white and black accused criminals during the rise and plateau of the BLM movement will be found. Hypothesis 3 predicted depictions of white and black accused criminals will retain some degree of difference through the plateauing of the BLM movement. This study examines reporting practices within the New York Times and the Arizona Republic for Black and White accused criminals across the emergence, rise, and plateau of the Black Lives Matter movement. Six hundred articles were collected, 300 from each newspaper, and broken down into groups of 50 for each of the three time periods. Partial support was found for Hypotheses 1 and 2 in both newspapers. Hypothesis 3 was fully supported in the New York Times but was not supported in the Arizona Republic. This research takes the first step in analyzing a possible impact that social movements can have on newspaper reporting practices. It also allows for future examination of social movements practices to determine strategies that help or hinder the movement and its message.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the people who helped me accomplish this, especially Professor David Wagner for giving me constant advice, putting up with my periods of minimal communication, and being available whenever I needed him, even after he retired. Thank you to Professor Virginia Eubanks who gave critical advice that helped shape this paper into the form it is today. Thank you to Professor Charles Shepherdson who invited me into the Liberal Studies program and helped work with me to see this thesis through to its completion. Finally, a well-deserved thank you goes out to my friends and family who withstood countless hours of unpaid work to help me finalize my ideas, proofread each version of this thesis, helped me not freak out over the amount of work I had to complete by a given deadline, and even helped me format documents for analysis. I couldn’t have completed this work without any of you.
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Effects of the Black Lives Matter Movement on Media Portrayals of Accused Criminals

Introduction

The Impact of Media

Media—such as music, television, and newspapers—are pervasive in our society (Hornik, & Schlinger, 1981; Taneja, Webster, Malthouse, & Ksiazek, 2012). Each time you get on the internet you are inundated with ads and news stories trying to garner your attention, music and radio are played in every department store, and all of this is just a mere touch away with the prevalence of smartphones (Roberts, 2000). We consume this information often without thought, without thinking of the possible impacts these words might have on us and our beliefs. Yet, the media do have a strong impact on us. When we are young and trying to learn about the world, we absorb the messages media teaches us and incorporate them into our understanding (Graber, 2010). When we have no other form of exposure to those outside our groups, we turn to media to teach us how they live and act (Graber & Dunaway, 2017, p. 3).

Mass media contributes to the process of deciding which frames are presented to the public. These frames are “a central organizing principle that holds together and gives coherence and meaning to a diverse array of symbols” (Misra, Moller, & Karides, 2003, p. 484). By using these frames, media highlights certain aspects of an event while downplaying other aspects (Wright, & Washington, 2018). For example, the language used in news reports constructs the reality and perception of each crime and tends to reinforce preconstructed social hierarchies. These social hierarchies are usually based upon social strata such as race, gender, and sexuality. When reporters use one word over another, they can both include and exclude information (Loge, 2005). For example, a reporter can choose to state the motivation of a shooter as self-
defense or as an act of retribution. The former conveys the idea of innocence and being forced to act, the latter an act done out of anger and conscious decision.

Once social hierarchies emerge, they skew how individuals perceive each other and their actions (Lunebörg & Fürsich, 2014). This can cause false attributions to be applied to one individual over another, and thus create a more negative or positive perspective towards that individual or group. These false attributions can be especially common in individuals that belong to a dominant group due to their separation from the marginalized (those lower on the social hierarchies, usually thought of as peripheral or insignificant) and the lack of a need to know about these other more marginalized groups (Graber, 2010, p. 2).

One such group of marginalized people in our society are accused criminals. Accused criminals are only acknowledged due to their assumed actions that have thrust them into the limelight and public consciousness. Since most accused criminals were never known before this, the knowledge divulged by the media is the sole knowledge that the public is given regarding the accused. The effects of this limited exposure to members of marginalized groups can foster false attributions such as the message that racism, sexism, and poverty are “natural” due to the marginalized groups being “inferior and threatening” is subconsciously conveyed (Collins, 1991). This pattern can be seen through the types of descriptions applied to different categories of criminals. Women are described as mentally ill, and dehumanized, especially when they are persons of color. This creates two patterns: women are either mad/sad or bad (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Brennan and Vandenberg also found that white female criminals are associated with positive stereotypes that excuse their behavior, but minority women have negative stereotypes associated with them that increase their likelihood for being held accountable.
The use of photos and titles in news coverage of shootings also shows this dynamic. White shooters are usually shown with university photos showing them as well dressed and in non-criminal settings. The titles for the coverage follow similar lines, depicting the individual as brilliant, athletic, devoted to religion or academics, a gentleman, etc. (Grabmeier, 2018; Wing, 2017). In contrast, black individuals are regularly shown with mug shots, gang paraphernalia or symbols, and in situations that link them to criminality. The titles refer to drug usage, school suspensions, their poor neighborhoods, possible gang connections, etc. (Grabmeier, 2018; Wing, 2017). Entman found that in television news stories, black suspects (as compared to white) are less likely to be identified by name, are not as well dressed, and are more likely to be shown physically restrained (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007, p. 62).

The discussion of these patterns is not new to scientific research. The effect of race on media depictions has been investigated in a multitude of studies (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Holt, 2013; Lundman, 2003; Misra, Moller, & Karides, 2003; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Wing, 2017). These studies have examined a myriad of things from intersectional effects of race and gender to the effects of counter-stereotypes. However, there has been little investigation into the effect of mass movements on media.

Mass movements use media to spread their message and garner support from the public. Usually, the use of this media is counter-cultural and pushes against the messages that are typically being shown (e.g. “controlling images”) (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). “Counter-cultural” here refers to values and norms of behavior that differ substantially from mainstream society or the dominant message being circulated within society. Sometimes, these messages are used to carry out “counter framing,” which is an attempt to discredit political opponents through
media coverage (McCurdy, 2012). These messages can be spread through pamphlets, newspaper reports, tweets, websites, etc. One such movement where the prevalence of counter-cultural messages has been examined is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

**The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement**

The BLM movement emerged in response to the shooting and subsequent death of a black youth, Trayvon Martin, by a white neighborhood watch member, George Zimmerman (Garza, Cullors, & Tometi, n.d.). The movement combats the systematic targeting of blacks in our society, specifically focusing on their treatment from the state (Garza, Cullors, & Tometi, n.d.). BLM garnered national attention with their hashtag, and hosted rallies and a national ride of over 600 people in response to another shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, a predominantly black city in St. Louis County. Through just its first two years, BLM generated 40.8 million tweets, over 100,000 web links, and 40 interviews of activists and allies (Freelon, Mcilwain, & Clark, 2016). While the movement has no explicit timeline beyond when the hashtag was initially created, a timeline can be created using major events of the movement. Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark (2016) derived such a timeline from the tracking of tweets related to Black Lives Matter. The hashtag “Black Lives Matter” emerged in July 2013 as a response to the shooting of Eric Garner. However, it did not receive much attention. It was not until the shooting of Michael Brown and the Ferguson riots in 2014 that the hashtag skyrocketed in popularity and the Black Lives Matter movement emerged. The movement continued to garner media attention and respond to a wide array of police shootings and clashes between police and protestors until roughly 2016. While the movement is continuing, it has not stayed at the forefront of news and, as such, we can designate the period of 2016-2017 as a plateau. I refer to this period as a plateau due to the movement possibly being shifted to the peripherals of both media’s and the public’s
attention. This could then decrease the momentum and impact of the movement. For example, a study measuring the number of newspaper articles about Black deaths found that while the number surged from 2014-2015, the numbers in 2016 returned to their pre-BLM movement numbers (Zuckerman, 2019).

I hope to expand upon the research of mass movements’ impact on culture by first examining whether there are disparate depictions of accused criminals in newspapers. I will also examine if there is a change in the possibly disparate depictions of accused criminals in newspapers concurrent with the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. If the media have an impact on how we come to understand and identify groups that we are not a part of, then mass movement’s use of media could help shift those understandings by speaking against the dominant cultural narrative. This shift could be seen through a decrease in the discrepancy between the depictions of black and white criminals, and therefore a more neutral stance in how these individuals are described. For example, a report might not allude to possible gang activity for a black criminal as it may have done prior to this movement.

The Present Study

Many researchers study mass movements and their impact on laws, policies, and culture (Chernega, 2016; Piven & Cloward, 2012). I go one step further and examine the impact of these movements on one of our sources of information: newspaper reporting. While the Black Lives Matter movement has been studied by academia in the realm of activism, mass struggle, and racialization of protest (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016; Leopold & Bell, 2017); there has not been an examination of this movement in connection with newspaper reporting. Due to the movement’s goal of education and spreading awareness, it seems pertinent to examine if those who work in print media noticed and were affected by the movement. While this cannot be
directly examined in this study, it does give us the first steppingstone: was there a change in the
depictions of black and white criminals during the rise and plateau of the Black Lives Matter
movement? If there was, then we could investigate further to determine whether the movement
played a role in this change and thus achieved one of its goals.

Study Hypotheses:

To determine whether there is a possible shift in depictions of accused criminals
concurrent with the Black Lives Matter movement, we must first establish that there is a
difference in these depictions before the movement emerged. Multiple research studies have
found that there is a difference in depictions between gender and race. (Brennan & Vanderburg,
2009; Grabmeier, 2018; Wing, 2017; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007, p. 62). Before any statement about
changes in the amount of difference can be made, we must first have a baseline. This baseline
will tell us how much difference already exists. Therefore, I proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. (Initial Differences in Depiction) Prior to the emergence of the Black Lives Movement, media depictions of black and white accused criminals will differ.

The mission of BLM has been described as being “…to intervene in violence inflicted on
Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (Garza, et al., n.d.). This interference is to be
accomplished in part through educating the populace about the discrepancies in treatment
between Black people and other racial groups. Because the movement responded to unnecessary
violence against Black individuals, most of their outreach began in pointing out the differences
between the state’s treatment of black and white individuals (Garza, et al., n.d.). As writers of
articles are educated about these, any false attributions they may make can begin to be corrected.
Writers may then begin to change their reporting practices to reflect this change in perspective.
This can be done by choosing more neutral words and creating a more neutral emotional tone.
Such articles would present a more neutral stance emotionally and avoid leading the reader to the belief that the accused had malevolent intent in their supposed actions.

**Hypothesis 2. (Reduction of Differences in Depiction)** During the rise and plateau of the BLM movement, the degree of difference between white and black accused criminals during will be reduced.

While the BLM movement may begin to change beliefs and perspectives, the dominant messages in media will continue [that racism, sexism, and poverty are “natural” due to the groups being seen as “inferior and threatening” Collins, 1991]. Since these messages are learned when we are children (Grabber, 2010), they will be fairly stable as we become adults and thus quite difficult to fully dismiss. Further, information that is counter-stereotype does not always lead to the stereotypes being abandoned. It could even be used to support the stereotype (Hinton, 2013). Therefore, changing depictions requires constant effort and takes much longer than the short span of years being examined here.

**Hypothesis 3. (Persistence of Differences in Depiction after BLM)** Depictions of white and black accused criminals will retain some degree of difference through the plateauing of the BLM movement.

While causation cannot be satisfactorily determined in this study, this study does begin to lay the groundwork for such an exploration in the future. Before causation can be analyzed, there must be evidence that there is a shift in disparate depictions in newspaper reporting. If these depictions are not actually significantly different or if there was no change in these depictions, then there is nothing further that needs to be analyzed. If this study finds both things to be true, then future studies can explore how the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement caused
newspaper reporting practices to change to decrease the difference between their portrayals of black and white accused criminals.

**Methodology**

**Establishment of Variables**

The kinds of differences in depiction I am considering are centered around the words chosen by authors of newspaper articles. This could be seen in a difference in whether the author’s words have positive or negative connotations. There could also be a difference in how much anger is being directed at the accused criminal, or if the author thinks the accused purposefully did the crime or not. These differences could be depicted along multiple dimensions.

I chose a computer program called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) to carry out several processes. First, it categorizes words into evaluative categories based upon their use in the articles. These categories are predefined in the program’s dictionary. Second, it allows me to distinguish which words have a positive or negative connotation within the article. Finally, it allows me to determine whether there is a higher percentage of positive or negative connotation words within the articles.

I examine newspaper articles from the years 2012-2017, which allows for a creation of three segments of study, each composed of a two-year span. The first segment, referred to as period 1, is before the Black Lives Matter movement began in earnest (2012-2013) so that we have a baseline for comparison with later coverage. The second segment, referred to as period 2 (2014-2015), encompasses the rise and peak of media attention given to Black Lives Matter. The final segment, referred to as period 3 (2016-2017), involves a period during which Black Lives Matter was still active but was not a major discussion in the media. Examining newspaper
articles during these three time periods allows me to determine what discrepancies between the
depictions are present in the coverage before, at the height of, and during the subsequent plateau
of the Black Lives Matter movement.

**Article Selection**

I investigate my hypotheses using articles chosen from the *New York Times* and the
*Arizona Republic*. The *New York Times* was chosen because it is easily accessible and is one of
the top three most circulated newspapers in the US (Veglis, 2007). It also plays an important role
in shaping how many other news outlets design their own programming and editorial decisions
(Pew Research Center, 2014). The *Arizona Republic* was chosen to help me determine whether
similar results appear in smaller newspapers with different political leanings. The *Arizona
Republic* is a daily newspaper circulated throughout Arizona and is the state’s largest newspaper.
While the *New York Times* is often considered a liberal newspaper, the *Arizona Republic* has
been historically conservative. Both newspapers identify the source of their articles if they are
not generated by their own reporters. This allowed for the elimination of articles not written by
either *New York Times* or *Arizona Republic* reporters.

Not all articles from each newspaper are examined. The articles selected must pertain to
an accused criminal, such as the preliminary report on the crime, a report on the criminal justice
proceedings, or a report on the results of the trial. I used the integrated search engines provided
by both newspapers’ archives allowed me to identify which articles met these criteria. For each
time period, the search was limited to January 1st of the first year (e.g. 2012) to December 31st of
the second year (e.g. 2013). I found articles using a list of key terms within the designated years (  

- Gun Violence
- Murder

  

9
• Terrorism
• Bribery
• Child Sexual abuse
• Drug traffic
• Political corruption
• Rape
• Political Violence
• Criminal Suspects
• Assault and battery
• Sexual Abuse
• Kidnapping
• Robbery
• Trial
• Arrest
• Criminal suspect
• Acquittal, Vandalism
• Gang Member
• Grand Jury
• Manslaughter
• Domestic Violence

These terms were chosen because they are commonly used in articles relating to crimes and criminal activities. They were also suggested by the newspapers’ search engines as related terms. Only articles where the accused were identified as belonging to either the white or black
racial category were selected. Articles regarding corporations, groups of individuals that were not all the same race, or where the individual’s race could not be determined were not included.

**Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)**

LIWC allows one to scan a document and calculate the percentage of total words in the document that match predefined dictionary categories. The basic categories are different emotions, thinking styles, social concerns, and parts of speech (such as verb, preposition, etc.). For example, LIWC may be given a single 2000-word newspaper article which it then scans and compares each word in the article to the built-in dictionary. It might then find that there are 150 positive emotion words and 84 pronouns in the article. This would reflect a percentage of 7.5% positive emotion words and 4.2% pronouns.

This program was originally designed by researchers to identify individuals’ social and psychological states as they are being conveyed through speech or texts (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Each text is formatted into a digital, computer readable form. The text analysis module built within the program then compares each word with the pre-programmed dictionary. While LIWC comes with three internal dictionary systems, custom dictionaries can also be created as needed. The master dictionary contains almost 6,400 words, word stems, and selected emoticons. Each word also has a corresponding dictionary entry that associates it with one or more word categories. For example, the word “smiled” is part of five word categories: Happiness, Positive Emotion, Overall Affect, Verb, and Past Focus.

To create a dictionary that codes for subjective word categories such as Power, the researchers followed a two-step process. First, they examined well-known standard dictionaries and thesauruses. They then had their team generate every word they could think of related to the category. This created their master list of category-related words (e.g.: happy, pretty, and good
belong to the Positive Emotions category), which was judged by a new group to evaluate whether they truly reflected the overarching concept. Words were only retained in the master list if all the judges agreed that it was appropriate. Finally, each word was tested to determine whether they were related to each other in a statistically significant way and identify any words that may have been missed. By being related in a statistically significant way, each word is strongly correlated with the others in their meaning and interpretation within the sentence. Thus, we can see that the words happy and good both refer to Positive Emotions, but the word mad does not.

Like every text analysis tool, LIWC can make mistakes due to the wide array of uses a single word can have. LIWC also does not understand irony, sarcasm, or metaphor. For example, the word “mad” can be counted in Anger, Negative Emotion, and Overall Affect, but it can also be Joy and Positive Emotion (e.g., “she’s mad for him”) or mental instability (e.g., “he’s gone mad”). To combat this, the program uses probabilistic models of language use. That is, it examines the rate of similarly-evaluated words being used overall in the document to make sure that the correct meaning is derived. For example, if “mad” is being used as a Positive Emotion then the author/speaker is expressing a positive state and is likely to generally use higher rates of other positive emotion words and fewer anger words. This system of probabilistic cross-checking works better the more words that are being analyzed. A text of 10,000 words provides more reliable results than one containing only 100 words. Analyses of any text with fewer than 50 words should be interpreted with skepticism (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015) and therefore, no texts of this length were included in this investigation.

Using LIWC, I analyze the category and percentage of words used in reports of accused criminals across the designated time period to evaluate whether there was a change in reporting
styles. For example, suppose I analyze reports from the period before BLM. I could possibly find that, on average, reports contain a high percentage of Negative Emotion words. If I analyze reports from the plateau of the BLM movement and see a lower percentage of Negative Emotion words, then I could say that the percentage has decreased over time.

I regard Hypothesis 1 (Initial Differences in Depiction) is supported if there is a significant difference between black and white accused criminals in at least three word categories. Hypothesis 2 (Reduction of Differences in Depiction During BLM) will be supported if there is a shift along at least three word categories between periods 1 and 2 that decreases the degree of difference between black and white criminals. Hypothesis 3 (Persistence of Differences in Depiction after BLM) will be supported in analysis if I find that there is a significant difference in at least three word categories between black and white criminals during period 3.

Results

I analyzed six dependent variables: Tone, Positive Emotion, Negative Emotion, Anger, Power, and Authenticity. Tone refers to the emotional tone of the writing; thus the higher the number the more positive the tone is. Previous research indicates that black individuals are associated with negative terminology and depictions; thus we expect the tone to be different across race (Collins, 1991; Brennand & Vandenberg, 2009; Grabmeier, 2018; Wing, 2017). Positive and Negative Emotion were chosen to get a more detailed investigation into a possible difference in tone between races. Anger was selected to see possible differences in the amount of anger directed at each race. Higher anger could be directing more blame to the individual, and previous research indicates that there is a difference in the amount of blame assigned based upon race (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Power contains words such as superior and bully, thus
establishing a power dynamic. I chose Power to investigate if the current societal dynamics of power are represented in the writing of newspaper articles (white having a higher amount of power than black). Finally, Authenticity refers to being personal, honest, and vulnerable. If less blame is assigned to white accused criminals, authenticity may play a part in helping excuse their actions and depicting their vulnerability. Collection of articles continued until each category contained 50 articles creating a total of 600 articles (see Appendix 1).

**New York Times**

Results relating to Hypothesis 1 about initial differences in media depictions are shown in Table 1 below. The differences in Authenticity is 12.498, and in Anger it is 0.502. Both differences are quite significant statistically. A higher percentage of Anger words were used in Black Accused articles. For Authenticity, Black Accused had over double the percentage of words than White Accused. The other variables show essentially no difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Category</th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>P-value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>8.916</td>
<td>10.996</td>
<td>2.077</td>
<td>0.379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>1.042</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotion</td>
<td>2.901</td>
<td>2.847</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>1.629</td>
<td>1.127</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>5.058</td>
<td>4.794</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>0.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>24.723</td>
<td>12.225</td>
<td>12.498</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P-values were determined using a two-tailed independent t-test

Results relating to Hypothesis 2 about a reduction in the degree of difference in media depictions are shown in Table 2 below. Authenticity’s mean difference significantly decreases.
from Period 1 to Period 2. The percentage of Authenticity words decreases for Black Accused (24.723 to 18.044) and increases for White Accused (12.225 to 14.878). Tone and Positive Emotion both increase in their differences resulting in a significant difference between Black and White Accused in Period 2. While the percentage of Positive Emotion words increases for both groups, White Accused see a larger increase, going from 1.042 to 1.409. All other categories don’t show significant differences statistically.

### Table 2: Differences in the mean percentage of words associated with each word category between Black and White accused criminals in NY Times articles during Periods 1 and 2 of the Black Lives Matter movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>P-Value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>8.916</td>
<td>10.996</td>
<td>2.077</td>
<td>0.379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>18.568</td>
<td>8.568</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>1.042</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>1.409</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>2.901</td>
<td>2.847</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>2.861</td>
<td>2.516</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>0.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anger</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>1.629</td>
<td>1.127</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>1.569</td>
<td>1.179</td>
<td>0.390</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>5.058</td>
<td>4.794</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>0.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>4.847</td>
<td>5.117</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>0.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>24.723</td>
<td>12.225</td>
<td>12.498</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>18.044</td>
<td>14.878</td>
<td>3.166</td>
<td>0.226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P-values were determined using a two-tailed independent t-test

Results relating to Hypothesis 3 about reports retaining differences in media depictions are shown in Table 3 below. Negative Emotion differs quite significantly statistically (1.880 for Black, 2.725 for White). Interestingly, a higher percentage of Negative Emotion words are used for White Accused. Power also differs significantly, with more Power words being used in White
Accused articles. Anger and Authenticity also differ between the two race categories, but to a lesser degree. Of note, a higher percentage of Anger words are used in White Accused articles (1.262 compared to 0.992 for Black Accused).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Category</th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>P-value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>16.211</td>
<td>12.136</td>
<td>4.075</td>
<td>0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>1.044</td>
<td>1.208</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>0.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotion</td>
<td>1.880</td>
<td>2.725</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>0.992</td>
<td>1.262</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>4.322</td>
<td>5.353</td>
<td>1.031</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>20.272</td>
<td>14.849</td>
<td>5.423</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P-values were determined using a two-tailed independent t-test

**Within-Race Analysis.** Additional analysis was conducted to compare within races, which lead to several interesting results shown in Table 4. First, for Tone, White Accused had a significant difference between Periods 1 and 2, and between Periods 2 and 3, but not for Periods 1 and 3. These shifts show the overall Tone becoming more positive between Periods 1 and 2, but more negative between Periods 2 to 3. Black Accused shows a large significant difference between Periods 1 and 3, and between Periods 2 and 3. The overall tone for Black Accused became more positive across both of these segments. This shift in positive tone was not due to an increase in Positive Emotion words but rather a significant decrease in Negative Emotion and Anger words across Periods 1 and 3, and Periods 2 and 3. Interestingly, there is also a significant
A decrease in the percentage of Authenticity words used in Black Accused articles between Periods 1 and 2.

| Table 4: Comparison of the Differences between Periods 1, 2, and 3 within race for New York Times articles |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                    | Difference between Period 1 and 2 | P-value* | Difference between Period 2 and 3 | P-value* | Difference between Period 1 and 3 | P-value* |
| Tone                                |                                |          |                                |          |                                |          |
| Black Accused                       | 1.083                          | 0.573    | 6.211                          | 0.002    | 7.295                          | 0.000    |
| White Accused                       | 7.572                          | 0.013    | 6.433                          | 0.028    | 1.139                          | 0.674    |
| Positive Emotion                    |                                |          |                                |          |                                |          |
| Black Accused                       | 0.104                          | 0.414    | 0.061                          | 0.622    | 0.165                          | 0.141    |
| White Accused                       | 0.367                          | 0.014    | 0.201                          | 0.187    | 0.166                          | 0.215    |
| Negative Emotion                    |                                |          |                                |          |                                |          |
| Black Accused                       | 0.406                          | 0.878    | 0.980                          | 0.000    | 1.021                          | 0.000    |
| White Accused                       | 0.331                          | 0.232    | 0.209                          | 0.402    | 0.122                          | 0.600    |
| Anger                               |                                |          |                                |          |                                |          |
| Black Accused                       | 0.060                          | 0.780    | 0.578                          | 0.001    | 0.638                          | 0.001    |
| White Accused                       | 0.052                          | 0.764    | 0.083                          | 0.625    | 0.135                          | 0.388    |
| Power                               |                                |          |                                |          |                                |          |
| Black Accused                       | 0.221                          | 0.602    | 0.525                          | 0.250    | 0.736                          | 0.109    |
| White Accused                       | 0.323                          | 0.358    | 0.236                          | 0.492    | 0.559                          | 0.077    |
| Authenticity                        |                                |          |                                |          |                                |          |
| Black Accused                       | 6.679                          | 0.050    | 2.227                          | 0.482    | 4.452                          | 0.195    |
| White Accused                       | 2.654                          | 0.203    | 0.029                          | 0.988    | 2.624                          | 0.203    |

*P-values were determined using a two-tailed independent t-Test

Arizona Republic

Results relating to Hypothesis 1 about initial differences in media depictions are shown in Table 5 below. Positive Emotion shows a significant difference, with White Accused having a
higher percentage (1.234 for White Accused, 0.805 for Black Accused). Interestingly, Power shows a difference but has a higher percentage for Black Accused (4.940 for Black Accused, 3.939 for White Accused).

### Table 5: Mean percentage of words associated with each word category in Arizona Republic articles identifying black or white accused criminals during Period 1 of the Black Lives Matter movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Category</th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>P-value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>10.461</td>
<td>9.409</td>
<td>1.052</td>
<td>0.719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>1.234</td>
<td>0.429</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotion</td>
<td>3.872</td>
<td>3.420</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>2.186</td>
<td>1.175</td>
<td>1.011</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>4.940</td>
<td>3.939</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>18.790</td>
<td>18.424</td>
<td>0.366</td>
<td>0.914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P-values were determined using a two-tailed independent t-test

Results relating to Hypothesis 2 about a reduction in the degree of difference in media depictions are shown in Table 6 below. Positive Emotion and Power both significantly decrease in their degree of difference. Positive Emotion goes from a difference of 0.429 to 0.067. Power changes from 1.001 to 0.457. Of note, Tone decreases for Black Accused (10.461 to 8.473) and increases for White Accused (9.409 to 11.581).

### Table 6: Differences in the mean percentage of words associated with each word category between Black and White accused criminals in Arizona Republic articles during Periods 1 and 2 of the Black Lives Matter movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Category</th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>P-Value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>10.461</td>
<td>9.409</td>
<td>1.052</td>
<td>0.719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>8.473</td>
<td>11.581</td>
<td>3.108</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results relating to Hypothesis 3 about reports retaining differences in media depictions are shown in Table 7 below. Interestingly, none of the categories differ significantly statistically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Category</th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>P-value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>10.390</td>
<td>10.562</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>1.229</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>0.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotion</td>
<td>3.076</td>
<td>2.957</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>1.698</td>
<td>1.339</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>4.904</td>
<td>4.525</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>0.338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>25.806</td>
<td>19.672</td>
<td>6.134</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P-values were determined using a two-tailed independent t-test
Within-Race Analysis. Additional analysis was conducted to compare within races, which lead to several interesting results shown in Table 8. Of note, the percentage of Power words used in White Accused articles shifts significantly between Periods 1 and 2. This shift is due to an increase in the percentage of Power words being used. For all other categories, we see no significant differences across the time periods. However, there is a pattern of a decrease in difference for Tone for Black Accused and Authenticity for White Accused.

Table 8: Comparison of the Differences between Periods 1, 2, and 3 within race for Arizona Republic articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Difference between Period 1 and 2</th>
<th>P-value*</th>
<th>Difference between Period 2 and 3</th>
<th>P-Value*</th>
<th>Difference between Period 1 and 3</th>
<th>P-Value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Black Accused</td>
<td>1.988</td>
<td>0.488</td>
<td>1.917</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Accused</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>1.019</td>
<td>0.648</td>
<td>1.153</td>
<td>0.609</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>Black Accused</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Accused</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.485</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotion</td>
<td>Black Accused</td>
<td>0.527</td>
<td>0.196</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.404</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Accused</td>
<td>0.528</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>0.463</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Black Accused</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>0.219</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>0.488</td>
<td>0.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Accused</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.799</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Black Accused</td>
<td>0.406</td>
<td>0.453</td>
<td>0.441</td>
<td>0.330</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.946</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

I began this study with the idea that the Black Lives Matter movement would affect how newspapers portrayed White and Black accused criminals. More specifically, I first hypothesized that there would be a statistically significant difference in the depictions of black and white accused criminals. I also theorized that there would be a reduction in the degree of difference in depictions between these two groups during the first and second time periods (before the BLM movement and during the rise of movement). However, these depictions will still have an evident (although perhaps to a lesser degree) difference after the major activities of the BLM movement abated (designated as period 3).

For the first hypothesis, there was partial support in both newspapers. For the New York Times, Anger and Authenticity both differed significantly between White and Black Accused. Both categories had a higher percentage of words for Black Accused. Regarding the Arizona Republic, Positive Emotion and Power differed significantly. Following previous research, White Accused had a higher percentage of Positive Emotion words. However, counter to prior research Black Accused had the higher percentage of Power words. This creates an interesting situation where the results of previous research were not fully replicated with the current sample. This could be due to a small sample size, or perhaps these newspapers were already using writing techniques that lend themselves to creating a more neutral stance. The fact that some categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
<th>White Accused</th>
<th>Black Accused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Accused</td>
<td>6.897</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td>7.016</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Accused</td>
<td>3.172</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>1.925</td>
<td>0.565</td>
<td>1.247</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P-values were determined using a two-tailed independent t-Test
did differ could point to a need for a different sampling pool, perhaps from newspapers in locations where BLM was actively protesting or from newspapers with more polarizing political stances.

While my second hypothesis was not fully supported in either newspaper, the absence of any significant change associated with the efforts of BLM is consistent with theories on the strength of false attributions. If these attributions are applied to stigmatized groups and reinforced by media, then it is possible that one social movement would not have the strength to destabilize them in a profound manner.

However, we do see partial support for my second hypothesis in both newspapers. For the Positive Emotion and Power dependent variables in the Arizona Republic, we can see that reporting practices start out with a higher difference in the percentage of words used associated with each category. However, once the BLM movement rises, we see these differences decrease. Of interest is that the differences in Positive Emotions decrease due to white accused criminals decreasing in percentage while black accused criminals increase. This could possibly be due to the BLM movement’s message about treating Black Americans equally in the criminal justice system. For the Power variable, we see that white accused criminals gain more power, putting them on par with Black accused criminals. For the New York Times, we see a drastic decrease in the degree of difference for Authenticity. This is due to Black accused criminals losing a large percentage while White accused gain a small amount. These results may be examples of counter-stereotypes creating a boomerang effect. A counter-stereotype is an idea or symbol that goes against a standard stereotype. For example, showing a woman as a mathematician is a counter-stereotype to the stereotype that women are bad at math. When counter-stereotypes are presented, individuals holding those stereotypes can chose to ignore them or even use them to
support their stereotypical beliefs (Hinton, 2013). This boomerang effect is theorized to strengthen stereotypic beliefs by triggering an attempt at bolstering the stereotype with supportive evidence (Kunda & Oleson, 1997). Perhaps this is what was done subconsciously in reporting practices. We also see a small shift in Anger with the percentage decreasing for Black accused criminals and increasing for White accused.

The third hypothesis was supported only in the New York Times. Anger, Negative Emotion, Authenticity and Power all had statistically significant differences. Interestingly, the differences in Negative Emotion and Anger are not in the predicted direction. White accused criminals had a higher mean percentage than Black accused criminals. This could possibly be due to the BLM movement pointing out the negative treatment of Black individuals and thus increasing the amount of negative emotions and anger generated towards White accused criminals, particularly White shooters. The difference in Authenticity is also not in the predicted direction. Black accused criminals have a higher percentage, possibly due to the BLM movement increasing sympathy with Black accused criminals. We also see the predicted difference in Power with White accused criminals having a higher percentage.

What was interesting is that unlike the national newspaper, the state-wide newspaper stayed relatively consistent across the time periods. Overall, it seems that the Arizona Republic is more neutral in their reporting practices. While before the BLM movement, there was little difference between the depictions of accused criminals for both newspapers, the Arizona Republic maintained this pattern throughout the time periods. This could possibly be due to the geographic location of the newspaper or the demographic makeup of the state. Perhaps due to the high percentage of Native American and Hispanic or Latino residents, there is more stigmatization directed to the Native American population compared to the Black population.
Arizona has a population made up of 31.6% of Hispanic or Latino, 5.3% Native American, and 5.1% Black or African American (U.S. Census, 2019). In contrast, New York has 19.2% Hispanic or Latino, 17.6% Black or African American, and 1.0% Native American (U.S. Census, 2019).

**Limitations**

The primary limitation with this research is the relatively small data pool that was used. From each newspaper only 300 articles were collected across a span of 6 years. With a larger data pool, it would be possible to better evaluate each hypothesis. Future research should be directed to examining a larger data pool to determine whether these trends hold or vary.

There was also no analysis of newspapers printed in locations where major BLM protests took place. This could have contributed to the lack of support for the first and second hypotheses, especially for the *Arizona Republic*. Perhaps analyzing the reporting practices of newspapers with highly active BLM chapters could result in more radical responses in newspapers either supporting or creating backlash for the movement.

There could also be reasons for why the *New York Times* and the *Arizona Republic* might show similar results. This could be due to possible pressure on reporting companies for a non-biased report. It could also be that the assumed difference in political stances is not as strong as it used to be. This could also lend reporting practices to be similar since they would not be attempting to sway a certain demographic or portray political ties.

There is also the issue of a possible biasing effect due to the choice of ignoring articles that did not allow for identification of the accused’s race. This could have led to not selecting as many violent crime articles thus decreasing the rate of negative words and anger. It also prevented the inclusion of most crimes committed by young adults and children as their names
and information are not included in the reports. This could impact the results due to an increase in leniency for children, and a possible increase in sympathy for them.

**Future Studies**

Future studies can follow several different routes to expand upon this research. First, other racial groups need to be examined. This would allow researchers to determine whether there is any fallout from the Black Lives Matter movement that affects other racial minorities. It would be interesting to evaluate whether the push for support from one racial minority also allows other racial minorities to receive the improved conditions.

As mentioned in the limitations, a study focused on the newspapers printed and circulated in the locations where BLM protests took place would greatly improve this area of research. If the BLM movement can have a long-lasting impact on reporting practices, then examining the place where individuals were most directly impacted by the movement is key. This could allow researchers to examine a wider array of variables for impact, as well as, see how prevalent the BLM movement is directly discussed in criminal justice reporting.

A third area where future research can be directed is examining the effects of other social movements on reporting practices. This piece of research allows us to see that social movements can have a possible effect on reporting practices. However, this theory would be greatly supported if these trends were discovered in relation to other social movements.

Finally, a project should be undertaken that would allow researchers to directly link the BLM movement with the changes in reporting practices. Such studies might provide more detail on exactly how and/or under what circumstances movements like BLM might affect reporting practices. While this study begins to form the connections between the two, there is no direct
causal evidence. To fully support this theory, a causal link must be created that shows that the BLM movement’s rise directly correlates to a shift to more neutral reporting practices.

**Conclusion**

While this study has several limitations, it does take an important first step in analyzing a possible impact that social movements can have on newspaper reporting practices. This project showed that the Black Lives Matter movement may have had some effects on how accused criminals are depicted, but that these effects are not enough to completely neutralize the discrepancies. If Black Lives Matter does succeed in changing the narrative, this could have major implications not only in the field of research but also in the field of developing social movements. Future social movements could look at the way BLM organized, protested, and spread their message to see what strategies worked and which ones didn’t. Research can also look at why some strategies successfully impacted some areas of media, but not others. This study also points out a possible mitigating variable of the impact: the location of the protests themselves. If newspapers that are far away from the main areas of protests are not impacted by the protest, then that points to a need for social movements to target certain locations that they may not have originally prioritized.

It is also important to note that what I am investigating here may be related to the boomerang effects of “counter-stereotypes” (Hinton, 2013). If a social movement’s goal is to disprove stereotypes, yet showing counter-examples instead does the opposite, then the process of disproving stereotypes needs to change. Perhaps showing images and examples of similarities between the groups and how everyone is the same rather than showing an extreme counter to the stereotype would be a better method. Whether through research or through real-world application in social movements, methods for protest need to be studied to determine not only if a social
movement is successful in its goals, but also what made it successful and how can those strategies be reproduced.
References


doi:http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.albany.edu/10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.965


https://www.media.mit.edu/posts/whose-deaths-matter-new-research-on-black-lives-matter-and-media-attention/
Appendix 1 Article Categories

*New York Times*

2012-2013: 50 articles for Black individuals, 50 articles for White Individuals

2014-2015: 50 articles for Black individuals, 50 articles for White Individuals

2016-2017: 50 articles for Black individuals, 50 articles for White Individuals

*Arizona Republic*

2012-2013: 50 articles for Black individuals, 50 articles for White Individuals

2014-2015: 50 articles for Black individuals, 50 articles for White Individuals

2016-2017: 50 articles for Black individuals, 50 articles for White Individuals