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The Representation of Female Victims in Front-Page News Stories: The Effect of
Race/Ethnicity

By

Danielle C. Slakoff

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

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The Representation of Female Victims in Front-Page News Stories: The Effect of
Race/Ethnicity

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University of Nebraska, 2018

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My dissertation examines how white, black, and Latina female victims are differentially portrayed in front-page newspaper stories. I hypothesized there would be differences across the three groups in 1) the total number of front-page stories, 2) coverage intensity and use of photographs, 3) presence of unsympathetic and sympathetic themes in newspaper stories, and 4) overall story narratives. To test my expectations, I examined front-page newspaper stories about female victims from seven widely-circulated U.S. newspapers from the calendar year 2006 with a mixed-methods approach. I found more front-page stories about white female victims than black and Latina female victims. In addition, white female victims were more likely to receive national/international coverage than black and Latina female victims. With regard to the differential presence of unsympathetic themes, stories about black female victims were significantly more likely to contain the “bad person” and “unsafe environment” themes than stories about white and Latina female victims (when assessed at the bivariate level). In contrast, when assessed at the bivariate level, stories about white female victims were significantly more likely than stories about black and Latina female victims to contain sympathetic themes (such as the “media attention mentioned” and “safe environment” themes). When the effects of a female victim’s race and ethnicity were analyzed at the multivariate level, stories about both black and Latina female victims were more likely to produce unsympathetic overall story narratives (rather than overall sympathetic narratives) of the victim. These findings are consistent with predictions gleaned from critical race feminist thought and illuminate the ways in which white, black, and Latina female victims are differentially portrayed in news stories.

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Stuart Slakoff, my father and number one fan.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Author’s Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
Index of Tables.....	vii
Index of Figures and Appendices.....	viii
Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 – Literature Review.....	9
Journalism and Mass Communication.....	9
Social Psychology.....	16
Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes.....	17
Critical Race Feminism.....	21
Prior North American Media Analyses: A Female Victim’s Race/ethnicity.....	24
A Closer Look at Narrative Themes about Female Victims.....	33
Visual Analyses of Female Crime Victims.....	38
Research Propositions.....	39

Chapter 3 – Methodology.....	41
Data.....	41
Methodological Approach.....	44
Qualitative Document Analysis and Coding.....	45
Descriptive Statistics: Independent Variables of Interest & Covariates.....	46
Descriptive Statistics: Dependent Variables.....	52
Analytical Techniques.....	60
Hypotheses.....	65
Chapter 4 – Findings.....	68
Bivariate Analyses.....	69
Multivariate Analyses.....	85
Chapter 5 – Discussion.....	93
Limitations.....	105
Conclusion.....	108
References.....	113
Appendices.....	140

Index of Tables

Table 2.1. Crenshaw’s Dualities Chart.....	18
Table 2.2. Summary of Findings from Studies of Depictions of Female Victims.....	26
Table 2.3. Madriz’s “Innocent” Versus “Culpable” Victim Chart.....	35
Table 3.1. Codes and Descriptive Statistics for the Independent Variables (n = 266).....	48
Table 3.2. Codes and Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variables (n = 266).....	53
Table 4.1. Victim Race/Ethnicity by Dependent Variables (Chi-square and Fisher’s Exact Test Analyses).....	69
Table 4.2. The Effect of Female Victim Race/Ethnicity on OSN—Baseline Multinomial Logistic Regression Models (N = 266).....	87
Table 4.3. The Effect of Female Victim Race/Ethnicity on OSN—Fully Specified Multinomial Logistic Regression Models (N = 266).....	89

Index of Figures and Appendices

Figure 3.1. Unsympathetic Themes by Overall Story Narrative.....	59
Figure 3.2. Sympathetic Themes by Overall Story Narrative.....	60
Appendix 1. Original Coding for Independent Variables (n = 266).....	140
Appendix 2A. Correlation Matrix for Independent Variables.....	143
Appendix 2B. Correlation Matrix for Victim Race/Ethnicity & Dependent Variables...	143

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Critical race feminist scholars argue the experiences of females will differ by their race/ethnicity, and white females will receive the best treatment due to their lack of minority status (Belknap, 2014; Potter, 2013). Put another way, minority females are doubly marginalized due to both racism and sexism, while white females are marginalized primarily due to sexism (Collins, 2000; Potter, 2006, Smith, 2010). Critical race feminism provided the foundation for this study. The primary goal of this study was to examine how white, black, and Latina female victims are differentially portrayed by the news media.

To put this study into context, it is important to point out that females' victimization rates vary across race and ethnicity (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009). When compared to black women, white women report lower levels of intimate partner violence (Nowotny & Graves, 2013). Black females are more likely to be victims of sexual assault (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009) and homicide than white women (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Regarding differences between Latina victims and victims of other races, Sorenson and Telles (1991) found immigrant Mexican American women had a higher prevalence of intimate partner sexual violence (31%) than non-Hispanic white women (13%), and Kalof (2000) found Latina college students had a higher incidence of attempted rape than both white and black female college students. Others, however, have found that white and black women experienced higher rates of rape victimization than Latinas (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen, and Stevens, 2011). But, scholars argue Latina victimization is gravely underreported,

perhaps due to language barriers faced by Latinas (Crenshaw, 1991) and/or immigration-status concerns (Office for Victims of Crime, n.d.). In general, research suggests Latina female victims have higher rates of victimization than white females but lower rates of victimization than black females (Catalano, 2006; Rennison, 2002).

Despite data that indicate black and Latina females have a higher likelihood of victimization than white females, media often disseminate stories about the victimization of white women and girls. Specifically, stories about missing or murdered white women and children receive exorbitant coverage, a phenomenon coined as the “missing white woman [or girl] syndrome” (Moody, Dorries, & Blackwell, 2009, p. 12) or the “missing pretty girl” syndrome (Malkin, 2005). Indeed, white female victims are often viewed as “ideal” or worthy victims (Christie, 1986; Gekoski, Gray, & Adler, 2012; Madriz, 1997; Sorenson, Manz, and Berk, 1998). Importantly, critical race feminists would find this “ideal” victim stereotype unsurprising given that white females have a privileged status in society (Collins, 2000; McIntosh, 1998; Smith, 2010).

The media’s unbalanced focus on white females and white children serves to perpetuate the “ideal” victim stereotype. Moreover, criminal justice practitioners (and members of the public) can be affected by these common portrayals. For example, Lee (2005) found police officers were more inclined to work to solve a case if the case received media coverage, and Bandes (2004) found extensive media coverage of an unsolved crime could place intense pressure on police to quickly solve the crime. Pritchard (1980) found that—in homicide cases—prosecutors were less likely to offer plea deals to offenders if the crime received extensive media coverage. In regard to differential criminal justice outcomes based on victim characteristics, Crenshaw (1991)

found offenders who raped black women received sentences far shorter than those who raped white women. Moreover, the American Civil Liberties Union (2014) reported “black youth with a white victim were far more likely to be sentenced to life without parole than white youth with a black victim” (p. 4-5). Furthermore, research shows that, although minorities are much more likely to be homicide victims, defendants are more likely to receive the death penalty when the victim is white (ForsterLee, ForsterLee, Horowitz, & King, 2006; Lee, 1998; Paternoster, 1984). Moreover, convicted killers of white females are more likely to receive a death sentence than convicted killers of minorities (Holcomb, Williams, & Demuth, 2004; Stauffer, Smith, Cochran, Fogel, and Bjerregaard, 2006; Williams & Holcomb, 2004).

Consistent with critical race feminist thought, news coverage should differ for white and minority female victims of crime. Few empirical studies have focused on this area of inquiry. There are studies focused singularly on the influence of a victim’s race *or* gender on media portrayals, but very few studies have examined how race/ethnicity and gender combine to influence story narratives about victimization. To be clear, most research either examines whether there are 1) differential portrayals of male versus female victims or 2) differential media portrayals for victims of varying races/ethnicities. Put another way, most researchers do not zero-in on differences among female victims. Feminist criminologists would view this lack of focus on females as a tremendous oversight; they argue criminological research should place differences among females at the center of inquiry (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Importantly, the limited existing research on media coverage of female victims tends to focus on specific types of female victims—

rape victims, missing women, victims of one serial killer, victims of domestic homicide, and victims in a warzone.

In general, the limited research in this area indicates white female victims are portrayed as good and innocent, while minority female victims are somehow blamed for their victimization and devalued as “bad” or “risk-taking” people (see for example Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Collins, 2016; Meyers, 2004; Slakoff & Brennan, 2017; Stillman, 2007). These findings are unsurprising given that white people are viewed as the baseline for goodness, while non-whites are somehow different (Funderburk, 2009). The thematic content of crime story narratives may differ for white and non-white female victims in other ways, and a primary goal of the current study was to search for possible new, emergent themes. In addition, since no researcher has yet compared how stories about Latina victims may differ from those for female crime victims of other races/ethnicities¹, I examined whether media portrayals of Latina victims differed from stories about white and black female victims. Importantly, critical race feminist scholars argue for an examination of females’ experiences beyond that of only white versus black females (Ortega, 2016). The findings from this study therefore shed light on how females of three different racial/ethnic categories were differentially portrayed across the examined news stories.

To date, only five studies explored differences in coverage intensity based on the race/ethnicity of a female victim. Moody and colleagues (2009) found more follow-up stories about missing white women than missing black women, and Gilchrist (2010)

¹ Past researchers have excluded Latina from their studies (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Moody et al., 2009), grouped Latinas with other minority groups (Slakoff & Brennan, 2017), or attempted to examine Latinas’ narratives but were unsuccessful due to a low number of stories (Cavender et al., 2009).

found white female victims received 3.5 times more news coverage than Aboriginal female victims. Parrott and Parrott (2015) found white female victims received more coverage than their black counterparts, while Slakoff and Brennan (2017) found white female victims received more repeated coverage than their non-white (i.e., black/Latina) counterparts.² It is worth adding that Slakoff and Brennan (2017) were unable to examine stories about black and Latina female victims separately because there were too few stories about Latina victims to allow for separate statistical examination. Indeed, the current study's dataset includes two times as many stories as the dataset used by Slakoff and Brennan (2017).

There may also be differences in the extent to which stories about female victims are local or national/international in scope, but only two studies to date have provided empirical examinations of this topic. Jeanis and Powers (2016) found missing women received more national coverage than missing men. Among female victims, however, Slakoff and Brennan (2017) did not find statistically significant differences in non-local coverage for white versus minority (i.e., black and Latina females combined) female victims.

Crime story photographs may also differ by a female victim's race/ethnicity, but only two studies to date have considered such a possibility. Gilchrist (2010) found photographs were more prevalent for stories about white female victims, but she did not examine whether the difference was statistically significant. Slakoff and Brennan (2017) examined statistical differences in the inclusion of photographs in crime stories for

² The examination of repeated stories is important because social constructionists argue a social reality—in this case, the reality that white women are likely crime victims—becomes dominant after various news sources say it is so (Surette, 2011). If a story is repeated, then consumers are provided with the same constructed message over and over (Surette, 2011).

female victims of varying races/ethnicities and found the difference between the white and non-white group was not statistically significant. No study to date has examined Latina female victims' photographic portrayals.

Another limitation of past research is that most of it tends to come in the form of case studies. For example, both Howard and Prividera (2004) and Kumar (2004) examined stories of Jessica Lynch's kidnapping during the War on Terror. In another study, Stillman (2007) compared coverage given to Jessica Lunsford versus the lack of coverage afforded to Donna Cooke. Other researchers have zeroed-in on the coverage of victims of particular serial killers. For example, both Jiwani and Young (2006) and Pitman (2002) examined stories about victims of Robert Pickton—a serial killer in Canada.

Past research also tends to provide only descriptive analyses; the clear majority of the extant work in this area provides no statistical assessment of differences between groups. To date, only Slakoff and Brennan (2017) and Parrott and Parrott (1999) used bivariate analyses to examine whether differences noted between white and minority female victims were statistically meaningful. No study to date has used multivariate analyses to examine differences in media accounts of female crime victims of varying races/ethnicities. This study fills this research gap by going beyond bivariate examinations.

In addition to the need for examinations of statistical differences for accounts of white versus minority female victims, an analysis of photographs warrants further study because images are used to draw readers into a story (Rossler, Bomhoff, Haschke, Kersten, & Muller, 2011), enhance the information present in text (Gibson & Zillmann,

2000), and signal to readers that a given story is important (Wanta, 1988). Additionally, researchers find most people remember a story's photograph long after they forget a story's content (Graber, 1990). Moreover, visual criminologists point to the need for explorations to go beyond assessments of a story's textual elements (Henne & Shah, 2016).

With the limitations of past research in mind, I examined front-page stories about black, white, and Latina female crime victims from seven different U.S. newspapers from the 2006 calendar year. These papers contained stories that were local, national, and international scope, and many different types of crime were featured in these stories. Importantly, my broad focus constituted a departure from previous crime-specific analyses. During this study, my primary goal was to determine whether different themes emerged in the stories about white, black, and Latina victims and to assess whether the differences were statistically meaningful. Meyers (1997) stressed the importance of examinations of key narratives because "underlying meanings and ideologies" will come to the surface via such pursuits (p. 13). Certainly, the search for key narratives was important, but I also explored (a) whether there were more front-page stories for white, Latina, or black female crime victims (b) the level of coverage intensity (i.e., extent of repeated coverage and local versus national/international focus) of front-page news stories about female crime victims of varying races/ethnicities, and (c) the frequency of news stories with front-page photographs.

Critical race feminism, sometimes called black feminist thought or intersectional feminism, provided the theoretical foundation of my study and was used to formulate my research hypotheses. Importantly, critical race feminist scholars argue for research

beyond the typical white-versus-black binary (Ortega, 2016); this study's focus on Latina female victims' portrayals moved beyond black-versus-white comparisons and examined the ways in which female victims of three different racial/ethnic groups were differentially treated by the media. My research findings were based on a methodology that followed Altheide's (1996) approach to qualitative document analysis, which was coupled with results from bivariate and multiple regression analyses. This study was the first to provide bivariate and multivariate examinations of differences in media portrayals of white, black, and Latina female victims; this dissertation's findings are connected to a larger body of work related to race and justice.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

An examination of media portrayals of female victims is an interdisciplinary endeavor. Research from the fields of journalism and mass communication, social psychology, and criminology and criminal justice are crucial to an understanding of this complex topic. In this literature review, I provide an overview of four concepts or theories from mass communication—framing, agenda-setting theory, gatekeeping theory, and cultivation theory. I follow that discussion with information about social psychology’s causal attribution theory and its influence on the development of stereotypes. Critical race feminist theory, which serves as the framework for this study, is then discussed, followed by an in-depth look at prior North American media analyses of female victims. From there, I provide a description of noted narrative themes about female victims and explain the need for explorations of story photographs. The chapter concludes with my research propositions.

Journalism and Mass Communication

Before I discuss specific theories, I want to briefly describe the news-making process. Chermak and Chapman (2007) argued journalists used specific criteria when determining which stories to report and how to report these stories (see also Lundman, 2003). Once a decision is made to write a story, journalists often write stories following pre-constructed scripts or templates (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, and Wright, 1996; Lundman, 2003; Oliver & Meyers, 1999). An example of a pre-constructed script is “crime is violent, and criminals are nonwhite” (Gilliam et al., 1996, p. 6).

An analysis of media accounts is meaningful because media reports influence people's perceptions (McQuail, 1984). Research shows the average American views the media as his or her main source of information for most aspects of life, including information about crime (Beale, 2006; Dowler, 2003; Heath, 1984; Petersen, 2016; Taylor, 2009; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Research shows accounts of crime are often presented by the media because crime news is simple to create, easily fills up space, and news consumers are generally interested in crime-related matters (Beale, 2006). Indeed, portrayals of the criminal justice system and victimization are important because news consumers view media messages as important. For example, the overrepresentation of missing white women and children in the news—a phenomenon called the “missing white woman syndrome”—gives the impression that white female victims are more vulnerable to attacks than minority victims, leading white women to have higher fear of crime (Wade, 2011, para. 9). Put another way, media outlets' decisions to frame, create, and classify issues in a particular way may influence consumers' views of particular issues and phenomena (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997).

Media framing is an important mass communication concept and is defined by Nelson and colleagues (1997) as “the process by which a communication source constructs and defines a social or political issue for its audience” (p. 221). In other words, a media frame is the storyline used to impart meaning on events; the frame allows readers to quickly identify the core tenets of an issue or controversy (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). To provide an example, in their experiment of television news consumers, Nelson and colleagues (1997) showed two groups of viewers a story. Both stories were about a Ku Klux Klan rally, but one story was framed as a “free speech”

story and the second was framed as a “public disorder” story (Nelson et al., 1997, p. 568). Nelson and colleagues (1997) found viewers of the free speech story “expressed more tolerance for the Klan” than viewers of the public disorder story (p. 568). To provide another example, the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s was framed as an issue within black communities and with black mothers, even though illicit drug use rates were—and are—similar across race (Sandy, 2003). In the case of the crack cocaine epidemic, powerful images of underweight black babies were used to frame the issue as a problem within black communities (Sandy, 2003).

Media frames are important for a variety of reasons. As illustrated by the examples above, the way media choose to represent an issue affects consumers’ understanding of that issue (Price, Tewskbury, & Powers, 1997). Indeed, Beale (2006) argues “framing is significant because it activates some ideas, feelings, and values more than others, and thus encourages particular trains of thought and leads audiences to arrive at certain conclusions” (p. 447). The mass media create the frames of reference consumers use to interpret events (Tuchman, 1978).

Research shows the concept of media framing is closely linked to agenda setting, with some scholars using the two concepts interchangeably (Scheufele, 1999). There is controversy over this interchangeability, however (Scheufele, 1999). In his influential description of agenda-setting theory, Cohen (1963) stated the media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p. 13; see also McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Soroka, 2002). Put another way, a person views an issue as worthy of attention if media

outlets portray it as such (Gross & Aday, 2003; Shaw, 1979), and the agenda portrayed by the media ultimately impacts the public's agenda (Soroka, 2002).

Agenda setting theorists have long alleged that media sources provide information to their audiences about actual and fictional dangers within their communities (Shaw, 1979). Crime news can influence how the public feels about crime and criminals (Graziano & Percoco, 2016), and may also cause consumers of news to perceive crime as a more concrete threat than crime data indicate (Beale, 2006). To provide an example, Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano (2010) found “media attention to immigration is higher in border states than in non-border states; as a result, residents of border states are more likely to identify immigration as a most important problem than are residents of non-border states” (p. 359). Thus, the media influence people's perceptions of the immigration “problem.”

Numerous crime events may occur on a given day, but newspaper editors and journalists must make the decision to cover a crime event (Shoemaker, 2006; Tuchman, 1978). Shoemaker (1991) defines “gatekeeping” as “the process by which the millions of messages available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day” (p. 1). Gatekeeping theory originated in Kurt Lewin's (1947) work. Although Lewin (1947) was interested in how food made its way to a kitchen table, his ideas were subsequently applied to the process of news coverage by David Manning White (see Shoemaker & Voss, 2009).

White's gatekeeper model starts with “news sources,” which “send news items to the media gatekeeper, who turns some [stories] away, and sends others...on to the audience” (Shoemaker & Voss, 2009, p. 16). In his work with a newspaper editor, White

discovered that the editor's decision-making process about what to publish was subjective, and a replication study also concluded that the editor's decision-making was based on his perception of what readers wanted (Shoemaker & Voss, 2009; see also Maibach & Parrott, 1995). Moreover, Craft and Wanta (2004) found journalists' political and personal views could influence media content.

Other scholars, however, believe the daily scramble to publish a newspaper does not allow much time for personal decision-making to influence story dissemination; instead, organizational routines affect which stories make it through the gate (Hirsch, 1977; Maibach & Parrott, 1995). Hirsch (1977) argued that widespread beliefs across newsrooms about what makes a story newsworthy have a more important influence on story selection than personal beliefs, and Cassidy (2006) found company-wide beliefs were more important in the news-selection process than individual beliefs.

In 1972, Donahue and colleagues "contended that through timing, position, repetition, and shaping of messages, gatekeepers influence not only passage through a gate but treatment once a news item passes the gate" (as cited in Maibach & Parrott, 1995, p. 201). A front-page story is particularly important. As Maibach and Parrott (1995) explain, front-page stories accompanied by a photograph have greater impact than stories buried within a paper's interior pages.

Cultivation theory is another theory within the mass communication literature and is often applied to studies of television's effects on the viewer. Cultivation theorists argue perceptions are altered based on repetitive messaging (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004), and "perceptions about the real world will match what is most frequently depicted in the media" (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004, p. 499; see also Grabe & Drew, 2007). This notion is

similar to Tversky and Kahneman's (1973) concept of the "availability heuristic," which means people estimate the frequency of an event or issue by how quickly relative associations come to their minds. Therefore, heavy media coverage of an issue will signify that the issue is common. For example, the public believes violent crime is a widespread issue, partially due to its overrepresentation within television news broadcasts (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003).

Importantly, cultivation theory is often viewed in terms of first-order and second-order effects:

"First-order effects represent prevalence estimates... assuming television overemphasizes female victimization, cultivation theor[ists] would predict heavy viewers of this content would subsequently overestimate the prevalence of violence against women in the real world. Second order effects represent attitudes. Building off the previous example, cultivation theor[ists] [would] predict a heavy television viewer might perceive women as in need of greater protection than men" (Parrott & Parrott, 2015, p. 72).

The cultivation of media messages is especially likely when content is perceived as realistic, and cultivation theorists argue news programs focused on crime cultivate fear more than other forms of programming (Grabe & Drew, 2007; see also Romer et al., 2003). In addition, Parrott and Parrott (2015) argued television tends to communicate the same messages repeatedly, thereby strengthening certain beliefs and/or stereotypes amongst news consumers.

The media's effect on viewers and readers is potentially troubling because misleading messages about crime may result in inaccurate perceptions about crime,

offenders, and victims. To provide an example, Cavender and colleagues (1999) argued television broadcasts have led to the social construction of young white women as victims. Along the same vein, Madriz (1997) argued that, due to the overwhelming number of portrayals of white women as victims, the average person believes white women are more likely to be harmed than black or Latina women. Furthermore, Dixon (2008) found frequent consumers of news featuring black criminals perceived black people to be more violent than their non-black counterparts.

To provide further discussion of how the cultivation of ideas may lead to false perceptions, since violent crimes are overrepresented in the news compared to their actual occurrence (Chermak, 1994; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000), individuals may come to erroneously conclude that violent crime is more common than property crime (Gilliam et al., 1996). Put another way, the news media's focus on crime news—specifically on homicide and other types of violent crimes (Chermak, 1994; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000)—may create the perception that the average person is likely to be violently victimized and must take measures to avoid the victimization (Romer et al., 2003). Indeed, Morgan and colleagues (2009) argued that people become fearful if they watch repetitive messages about crime, and Marsh (1989) claimed the media's focus on violent crimes—usually presented without any information on how to prevent victimization—resulted in exaggerated fears about the likelihood of victimization.

Although evidence in support of cultivation theory most often comes from studies of viewership of television news and fictional crime programming, the impact of repetitive messaging on newspaper readers is also of great concern (Vergeer, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2000). In their study of how Dutch newspaper coverage of ethnic minorities

affected beliefs among readers, Vergeer and colleagues (2000) found “that exposure to a newspaper characterized by negative reporting about ethnic crime lead people to perceive ethnic minorities as more of a threat” (p. 127). Specifically, Vergeer and colleagues (2000) found readers of *Telegraaf*—a paper known to portray ethnic minorities as threatening and criminal—believed minorities were more threatening than readers of other Dutch newspapers.

Social Psychology

Social psychologists discuss the process by which ideas are formed about others. Causal attribution theorists argue indirect experiences affect perceptions of the outside world (Kelley, 1973; Sacco, 1996; Tyler, 1980); individuals use information given to them to make judgements about other people’s actions (Ross, 1977). Most people are not directly impacted by crime, so they learn about—and make judgements about—offenders and victims indirectly based on media portrayals (Davies, Francis, & Greer, 2008; Sacco, 1996). As Sacco (1996) explained, public fears are rooted in “vicarious rather than direct experiences,” and the media overrepresent violent crime (p. 151). Therefore, Sacco (1996) argued public fear about crime was related to heavy media coverage of crime. Put another way, media messages will be especially important to idea formation if consumers do not have direct experience with crime (Liska and Baccaglioni, 1990; see also Dowler, 2003). Moreover, media messages about criminal events will help non-crime-affected consumers attach meaning to other people’s behavior, creating causal attributions about crime, criminality, and victimization (McLeod, 2012). Regarding ideas about offenders, Dixon (2008) argued that every time a person was exposed to the black criminal

stereotype, the association he/she had about black people and criminality strengthened. Simply stated, causal attributions lead to stereotypes about offenders and victims.

Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes

When individuals meet for the first time, stereotypes are triggered based upon the other person's most obvious traits, such as their race, ethnicity, gender, and other easily-distinguishable characteristics (Healey, 1997; see also Gilman, 1985; Gladwell, 2005; Entman, 1997). Stereotypes are mental shortcuts that allow people to place others into groups (Entman, 1997; Gladwell, 2005; Healey, 1997), and these stereotypes help individuals to categorize the world around them (Gilman, 1985). Although not all stereotypes are harmful (e.g., women are good with children), negative stereotypes can allow individuals to develop adverse beliefs about people placed into negative categories (Entman, 1997).

For example, black people appear in television news stories as perpetrators of crime one and a half times more often than they appear as victims, which feeds into negative stereotypes (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004). Some common stereotypes of black people are that they are aggressive and violent (Beale, 2006; Dixon, 2008; Devine, 1989; Rome, 2006; Sigelman & Tuch, 1997), criminal (Beale, 2006; Creighton, Walker, & Anderson, 2014; Rome, 2004; Sigelman & Tuch, 1997; Welch, 2007),³ lazy and untrustworthy (Fife, 1974; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000), uneducated (Creighton et al., 2014; Devine, 1989; Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998), and drug users (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997; Steffensmeier et al., 1998;

³ According to Parker and colleagues (2016), "roughly half of blacks (47%) say that in the past 12 months someone has acted as if they were suspicious of them because of their race or ethnicity" (p. 13).

Welch, 2007). In particular, “the stereotyping of blacks as criminals is so pervasive throughout society that ‘criminal predator’ is used as a euphemism for ‘young black male’” (Welch, 2007, p. 276; see also Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002). Racial hoaxes provide a concrete example of the pervasiveness of the criminal stereotype: When someone “makes up” or “creates” an offender, he/she often says a nameless black male committed the crime (Russell-Brown, 1998). For example, after killing her two young children, Susan Smith—a white female—told police a black male kidnapped her children (Cahill, 2014). Investigators initially believed her account, but soon realized her timeline of the disappearance did not make sense (Cahill, 2014).

Crenshaw (1988) argued that “each traditional negative image of blacks correlates with a counter-image of whites,” which is summarized in the following table:

Table 2.1. Crenshaw’s Dualities Chart

White Images	Black Images
Industrious	Lazy
Intelligent	Unintelligent
Moral	Immoral
Knowledgeable	Ignorant
Enabling Culture	Disabling Culture
Law-Abiding	Criminal
Responsible	Shiftless
Virtuous/Pious	Lascivious

Adopted from Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1373

Crenshaw’s (1988) “dualities chart” shows the association of favorable character traits for whites compared with unfavorable associations for blacks. These contrasting images of whites and black are unsurprising given that white people are afforded a privileged status in society (McIntosh, 1998).

African Americans are not the only negatively stereotyped minority group.

Vargas (2000) argues Latino/as are viewed as unskilled laborers in America. Latinos are

also portrayed as illegal (Mata Jr. & Herrias, 2006) and violent (Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Dixon & Linz, 2000). In fact, while running for the office of U.S. President, Donald Trump stated, “when Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best... They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (Reilly, 2016; para. 5). Later, in his first State of the Union address, President Trump emphasized this line of thinking by providing a description of the “many innocent lives” taken by MS-13 gang members who illegally entered the United States (Robbins, 2018, para. 1). In line with such beliefs, Latino males are portrayed in television as inarticulate people with hard-to-understand accents (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000), and both Latino men and women are portrayed as macho and tough (Falicov, 2010; Guzman & Valdivia, 2004; Tolchin, 2007). Moreover, Turk and colleagues (1989) found Hispanics were much more likely to appear in crime stories as perpetrators rather than victims. Put another way, Latinos and Hispanics are generally portrayed as troublemakers involved in various nefarious activities (Turk et al., 1989).

Researchers also acknowledge minority women have consistently been stereotyped more negatively than white women (Ammons, 1995; Brennan, 2006; Farr, 2000; Landrine, 1985), which aligns with critical race feminist thought regarding the double marginality faced by minority females (Higginbotham, 1983; Potter, 2013). Black women are stereotyped as aggressive (Lobasz, 2008; Young, 1986), sexually promiscuous or easy (Ammons, 1995; Farr, 2000; Madriz, 1997; Meyers, 1997; Norwood, 2014; Rome, 2004), coming from broken homes (Ammons, 1995),⁴ “welfare

⁴ Recent research from Parker and colleagues (2016) shows that white people rank “family instability” and “lack of good role models” as “major reasons that blacks may have a harder time getting ahead than whites” (p. 10). Alternatively, black respondents thought “lower quality schools, discrimination, and lack of jobs” were to blame (Parker et al., 2016, p. 10).

queens” (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997, p. 393; see also Ammons, 1995; Culverson, 2006; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996),⁵ and as “dirty, hostile, and superstitious” (Landrine, 1985, p. 71-72). The portrayal of black women as promiscuous is important because females who want (and seek out) sexual intimacy are viewed as anti-feminine (McLaughlin, 1991). Moreover, welfare queens are viewed as lazy (Ammons, 1995). Although Latina women are also portrayed as overtly sexual (Guzman & Valdivia, 2004; Mata Jr. & Herrerias, 2006) and as welfare queens (Lombardo, 2014), they are additionally characterized as “spitfires” with “bright seductive clothing, curvaceous hips and breasts, long brunette hair, and extravagant jewelry” (Guzman & Valdivia, 2004, p. 211).

In comparison, white women are stereotyped as “competent, dependent, emotional, intelligent, passive...and warm” (Landrine, 1985, p. 72). White women are often described as good mothers (Wanzo, 2008), while black women are viewed as inept or overbearing mothers (Ammons, 1995; Pratt-Clarke, 2010). Moreover, middle class white women are often described as virtuous and pure (Madriz, 1997). Even in news articles about female offenders, white women’s criminal behavior is likely to be excused in ways that minority female offenders’ behaviors are not (Brennan, Chesney-Lind, Vandenberg, & Wulf-Ludden, 2015; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Vandenberg, Brennan, & Chesney-Lind, 2013).

Differential stereotypes about white and minority females are consistent with the underlying belief of critical race feminism; indeed, white females are treated as somehow

⁵ In focus groups with black youth, Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson (2014) found “that black youth, both male and female, readily identified many images of black women on television as negative, inaccurate, and offensive.” (p. 79). They said black women were portrayed as “sexual” and “angry” and “strong” (Adams-Bass et al, 2014, p. 87).

superior to their minority counterparts (Higginbotham, 1983). Moreover, given the pervasiveness of negative stereotypes for minorities, it is unsurprising that people who take race-implicit-association tests⁶ hold stronger negative beliefs about black people than white people (McConnell & Lebold, 2001). And, it is interesting to point out that Devine and Elliot (1995) found both high- and low- prejudiced individuals identified the same stereotypical traits for black people when asked to do so.

Critical Race Feminism

Historically, race has been used to “order” people. Indeed, as early as 1775, anatomist Johann Blumenbach created a racial hierarchy with Caucasians at the top and people of color at the bottom (as cited in Gabbidon, 2015). This historical “ordering” of people based on race has persisted over time; I argue the concept of racial ordering provides reasoning for why researchers should examine how a person’s race (in tandem with other characteristics) may matter.

In general, critical race theorists examine the ways in which race and other character traits (such as gender) combine to influence treatment by others (Solorzano, 1997). According to critical race theorists, “whiteness” is privileged in American society (Funderburk, 2009; Guzman & Valdivia, 2004; Smith, 2010) because the interests and perspectives of white people dominate American culture (Curry, 2009; Gillborn, 2015; McIntosh, 1998). In the context of critical race theory, the white person “is seen as a kind of baseline for human righteousness,” and the white person is viewed in contrast to the non-white person (Funderburk, 2009, p. 170). Importantly, if white people are a “baseline

⁶ The race-implicit-association test, created by Greenwald and colleagues, “measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy)” (Harvard University, 2011, para. 1).

for human righteousness” and are viewed as good and powerful, then everyone else—including minority people—are below that baseline (Funderburk, 2009).

But, critical race feminists point out that scholars need to consider more than a person’s race or ethnicity. To clarify, critical race feminism, which is also sometimes referred to as black feminist thought or intersectional feminism, stresses the importance of the intersection between race and gender (Belknap, 2014; Collins, 2000; Potter, 2006). According to Smith (2010), white women and girls are viewed as the “Other” because they are female, while minority women and girls are viewed as “the other Other” due to their race and gender (p. 43; see also Ortega, 2016). Put another way, white females receive a privileged status; the lives of white females are different than the lives of minority females because non-white skin devalues minority females and makes them vulnerable to negative treatment (Beal, 1970; Higginbotham, 1983; McIntosh, 1998; Potter, 2013; Smith, 2010).

“Black, brown, yellow, and red people have to live within the boundaries defined by others because of their color. Racism is an ideology that justifies the exclusion of people of color from certain areas of economic and social life. It also operates to promote the tolerance of inequities on the part of other members of society. Historically, and to this day, racism is institutionalized in the United States and has a daily impact on the lives of racial and ethnic people” (Higginbotham, 1983, p. 200-201).

Minority females live with pressures that white females do not. For example, Smith (2010) argues that while white women have made gains in the workforce, minority

women have not yet done so. Moreover, as Potter (2013) argued, the combined negative effect of both racism and sexism is unique to women of color.

With regard to media accounts of victimization, critical race feminists would argue there is a need to examine which stories are told about females and *how* the stories are constructed (Smith, 2010). Importantly, scholars believe traditional views on race are socially constructed and not based on actual biological differences between groups (Curry, 2009; Gans, 2005; Welch, 2007). The media are one venue in which race is socially constructed (Welch, 2007).

In terms of differences among black and Latina female victims, critical race feminists would also argue the experiences of one minority group should be viewed as distinct from the experiences of other minority groups (Ortega, 2016, Potter, 2013). Indeed, Latina feminist scholars argue it is time to move beyond typical white-versus-black examinations and focus on other groups, such as Latino/as (Ortega, 2016; see also Guzman & Valdivia, 2004). This focus on multiple “others” is a significant step toward a more multicultural and intersectional feminism (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Importantly, Guzman and Valdivia (2004) argue Latinas tend to fall “somewhere between whiteness and blackness” (p. 218).⁷ Simply stated, the experiences of white, black, and Latina females are not shared (Potter, 2013) and, therefore, are worthy of separate examination.

As argued by Solorzano (1997), people need to understand the experiences of minority people to effectively analyze and understand how racial subordination persists in American culture. As such, it is important for researchers to examine the effects of

⁷ Interestingly, Latina actresses—such as Jennifer Lopez and Salma Hayek—have earned roles that were originally written for white characters, but black actresses do not seem to garner such roles (Guzman & Valdivia, 2004).

race/ethnicity and gender in tandem since white, black, and Latina women and girls differ from one another. As discussed by Reid and Comas-Diaz (1990), if a researcher examines a victim's gender but fails to simultaneously consider his/her race/ethnicity, then the outcomes under investigation will be short-sighted and incomplete. With critical race feminist thought in mind, I examined whether and how media accounts differed for white, black, and Latina female victims of crime. My study, therefore, added to the burgeoning field of critical race feminist thought.

Prior North American Media Analyses: A Female Victim's

Race/ethnicity

There has been very limited research on the news coverage of female victims and whether this coverage varied by the victim's race/ethnicity. Put another way, very few researchers have examined the combined effect of a female victim's race/ethnicity and gender and how that combination may influence the level of coverage a given victim receives or the way a story is crafted. Most of the extant literature on media accounts of crime either tends to focus on male offenders (see for example Creighton et al., 2014; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Rome, 2006), differences in coverage of male and female victims (see for example Anastasio & Costa, 2004; Jeanis & Powers, 2016; Min & Feaster, 2010), portrayals of female victims without any discussion or focus on the effect of the victim's race/ethnicity on the type of coverage received (see for example Bullock, 2007; Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013), or on general explorations of victim newsworthiness (see for example Buckler & Travis, 2005; Gruenewald, Chermak, & Pizarro, 2013).

For the most part, researchers who have studied news coverage of victims find white people are generally overrepresented as crime victims (see for example Jeanis &

Powers, 2016; Min & Feaster, 2010; Simmons & Woods, 2015), and female victims are overrepresented relative to male victims (see for example Johnstone, Hawkins, & Michener, 1994; Mawby & Brown, 1984; Sorenson et al., 1998). While it has been established that female victims receive considerable media attention, relatively few researchers have exclusively examined media portrayals of female victims (for some exceptions see Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Gilchrist, 2010; Moody et al., 2009; Slakoff & Brennan, 2017). Thus, we know very little about how female victims of varying races/ethnicities are depicted relative to one another, which critical race feminists argue needs attention.

To advance research, I examined whether coverage for white, Latina, and black female victims differed. To date, fifteen studies have examined media representations of female victims, but few of these studies allowed for comparisons to be made between portrayals of white versus minority women. These 15 studies are summarized in Table 2.2 on the following four pages.

Table 2.2. Summary of Findings from Studies of Media Depictions of Female Victims

Author(s)	Sample	Method	Research Focus	Findings
Ardevini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald (2002)	123 magazine stories from 1980-1996 about 10 “well-covered” rape cases; different national magazines included, but <i>Newsweek</i> , <i>Time</i> , and <i>People</i> were most common	Content analysis	The extent to which victim-blame and offender-blame statements were present in stories and case characteristics that affected blame statements (e.g., number of offenders, un/known offender, victim/offender race and class)	For all 10 rape cases, stories with victim-blaming statements were found, but the extent to which such statements appeared varied by case. Victims “acquainted in some fashion with the man/men who attacked them” were blamed (p. 11), as were victims who were drinking (p. 17). Victim blaming was least likely when it was a stranger attack. Cases with white female victims (versus black females) and rapes of white women by minority men produced stories with a smaller percentage of victim blaming statements and a higher percentage of statements sympathetic to the victim (p. 14 & 15).
Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik (1999)	24 episodes of <i>America’s Most Wanted</i> (resulting in 59 portrayals of a female victim) from 1989 or 1996	Content analysis	The ways in which female victims are portrayed in reality crime television	White female victims were the clear majority of female victims on <i>AMW</i> in both 1989 and 1996, while black victims were underrepresented. Only 1 Latina victim was shown in the 24 episodes. Stranger assailants were overrepresented. The vignettes about the victims included mundane details about the victims’ lives, and many of the victims were portrayed and good but naïve people.
Collins (2016)	2131 articles describing male and female victims and offenders in Canadian newspapers from four cities (458 articles were about female victims)	Mixed-methodology utilizing content analysis and critical discourse analysis	The ways in which female (and male) victims (and offenders) were portrayed in local Canadian newspapers (with much of the focus relative to male offenders)	Findings largely compared female victims/offenders with males; comparisons between female victims of different races were not the focus. Some women were victims due to “poor decisions and lifestyle choices” (p. 307). Newspapers rationalized crimes committed against minorities—the victim either sought out, lied, or deserved the victimization. Contrasting narratives for two female victims were used to suggest that relative to white female victims, minority female victims were “often portrayed as uneducated, neglectful mothers, who more often than not reside in a poor neighborhood” (p. 307-308).
Gilchrist (2010)	240 local news stories from 2003 to 2006 about 3 missing or murdered Aboriginal women from Saskatchewan and 3 missing or murdered white women from Ontario	Comparative content analysis of matched cases	Examination of the amount of coverage, length of story, placement of story, size of photographs, and narratives	The Aboriginal women received 3.5 times less coverage. Stories about them were shorter, less likely to appear on the front page, and contained smaller photographs. White women’s stories were more likely to contain photographs, and their narratives contained more personal information, such as information about the victim’s personality and hobbies.

Table 2.2 continues next page

Table 2.2 (continued). Summary of Findings from Studies of Media Depictions of Female Victims

Author(s)	Sample	Method	Research Focus	Findings
Howard & Prividera (2004)	A total of 218 transcripts from television news broadcasts (ABC, NBC, and CBS) and magazine stories (<i>Newsweek</i> , <i>US News & World Report</i> , and <i>Time</i>).	Case study, Discourse Analysis	Examination of how stories about Jessica Lynch help maintain beliefs that women do not belong as soldiers	Jessica's story "aggravates the rift between 'women' and 'soldiers' in the U.S. military and perpetuates the 'female soldier' paradox," which states that women are viewed as lesser than on the battle field (p. 89). In story narratives about Jessica, she is viewed primarily as "victim" and not "soldier." The extensive coverage of Lynch's victimization was due to her fitting the "submissive female archetype" (p. 89). Lynch was "sexually vulnerable" (p. 93) and fit an image of innocence (p. 94).
Kumar (2004)	Television, news, and magazine stories about Jessica Lynch, a POW in the Iraq War	Case study	The ways in which Jessica Lynch was portrayed during three distinct time periods—her rescue, her return home, and Veteran's Day	Jessica Lynch was portrayed as a typical "damsel in distress" who was in need of protection and saving from the Arab predator (p. 300).
Lobasz (2008)	Articles from 5 different U.S. newspapers over an 18-month period focusing on two white female soldiers in Iraq and comparing their coverage to that of two male soldiers in Iraq	Discourse Analysis	The ways in which female soldiers are described in newspaper accounts of their victimization	Jessica Lynch fit the stereotypical "girl next door" stereotype and was portrayed as a "woman in peril," while Lynndie England was portrayed as a "ruined woman" because she was portrayed as overtly sexual and had short, cropped hair.
Meyers (2004)	52 stories from the <i>Atlanta Journal and Constitution</i> from 1994 - 1996 & half-hour ABC, NBC, CBS newscasts in Atlanta from April 12- 25, 1996, about African American female victims	Discourse analysis of content	Whether victim blame narratives were present in stories about African American female victims of Feaknik in Atlanta	"News coverage of violence against African American women during Freaknik blamed them for their own victimization and minimized the seriousness of the violence. The news implied these women were either naifs... or, more commonly, oversexed Jezebels whose lewd behavior provokes men to grope, fondle and even rape" (p. 111).

Table 2.2 continues next page

Table 2.2 (continued). Summary of Findings from Studies of Media Depictions of Female Victims

Author(s)	Sample	Method	Research Focus	Findings
Moody, Dorries, & Blackwell (2009)	738 combined transcripts and newspaper articles from NBC and CBS network newscasts and <i>The Washington Post</i> and <i>USA Today</i> about 2 missing white women and 2 missing black women from 2002 to 2005	Comparative content analysis	Whether different thematic frames were used in stories about white and non-white missing females and whether coverage intensity differed	The two missing white women received substantially more news coverage; only 1.2% (n = 9) of the transcripts were about the two black victims. Coverage of the white women included information about their personalities, friends, family, and physical attractiveness, whereas coverage on the black women tended to discuss their difficult life circumstances (e.g., joblessness, abusive partners).
Jiwani & Young (2006)	128 <i>Vancouver Sun</i> articles from 2001 to 2006 about the victims of one serial killer, Robert Pickton	Content analysis	The types of thematic frames utilized in the coverage of the disappearances/deaths of the female victims of one serial killer	39 of 67 victims were Aboriginal, but the news stories framed the victims as “mostly Aboriginal, drug-addicted sex-trade workers” (p. 902), who operated in an unsafe part of town.
Parrott & Parrott (2015)	65 episodes of fictional crime-based dramas focusing on white and black offenders and victims of crime (both genders)	Quantitative content analysis	Whether accounts of sexual assault victimization differ for white and black female victims	They found “white female television characters stood a greater chance of being rape or sexual assault victims, being victims of serious harm at the hands of an assailant, or being attacked by a stranger” than white male, black female, and black male television characters (p. 70). Their findings support the notion that white females are particularly at risk of stranger victimization and are stereotyped as vulnerable
Pitman (2002)	One episode of <i>American’s Most Wanted</i> from 1999 and news stories from <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> about female victims of one serial killer	Descriptive case-study about a “reality cop show” and newspaper accounts of the victims of a serial killer	How victims of one serial killer are portrayed in a reality television show and in a local newspaper	Many of the media accounts focused on the “bad neighborhood” and sex work of the victims. 31 women disappeared, and most were Native American. <i>American’s Most Wanted</i> chose to represent a missing “native sex worker” named Sarah deVries with a white actress. This “amounted to a warning to [young] white women who frequent [the] downtown area[s] and who, if they behave in certain ways or assume certain appearances, could be mistaken for prostitutes” (p. 180).

Table 2.2 continues next page

Table 2.2 (continued). Summary of Findings from Studies of Media Depictions of Female Victims

Author(s)	Sample	Method	Research Focus	Findings
Slakoff & Brennan (2017)	131 front-page newspaper stories portraying a female victim from 4 different United States newspapers	Qualitative document analysis	Examination of differential narrative themes, coverage intensity, and use of photographs for white versus black/Latina female victims in front-page newspaper stories	Stories about white female victims received more repeated coverage and were more likely to contain sympathetic narratives (e.g., attacked by a predator stranger, resided in safe environment) than stories about Latina/black female victims. Latina/black female victims were more likely to be portrayed as risk-takers and “bad” people, and their victimization was normalized through descriptions of their unsafe environments. Use of photographs did not statistically differ for the stories about white versus black/Latina victims.
Stillman (2007)	Public archives, including news accounts, for two females killed in Florida	Case study comparison of coverage given to Jessica Lunsford versus lack of coverage of Donna Cooke (both are white females)	Examination of the types of missing and murdered women who make the news	“Unlike Jessica Lunsford, whose personal story is documented in over 340,000 million Internet search entries that include intimate anecdotes and family photographs, Donna’s life surfaces in the public archives only through mug shots and police reports (for prostitution); medical records (for state-mandated drug rehabilitation)... and death records” (p. 498). The media “position the lives of certain young, white, well-off women as worthy of societal empathy, while casting others as disposable lives” (p. 500). Stillman noted that “media narratives... [tend to] naturalize the deaths of certain ‘kinds’ of women (poor, nonwhite, precariously employed)” (p. 493).
Taylor (2009)	292 <i>Orlando Sentinel</i> articles about 168 cases of domestic homicide from 1995 to 2000	Content analysis	Examination of the presence of victim-blame narratives in stories about female victims of domestic homicide	Several methods were used to discredit or blame victims (p. 35). Negative accounts highlighted past poor decision-making (such as infidelity and drug-use). Differences by a victim’s race/ethnicity were not examined.

As shown by Table 2.2, in eleven of the fifteen studies, researchers examined portrayals of females who experienced very specific forms of victimization. For example, researchers examined accounts of missing and/or murdered females (Gilchrist, 2010; Moody et al., 2009; Stillman, 2007; Taylor, 2009), victims of a specific serial killer (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Pitman, 2002), female rape victims of specific rapists (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002), female victims during the War in Iraq (Howard & Prividera, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Lobasz, 2008), and female victims during Freaknik, a spring break ritual in Atlanta, Georgia (Meyers, 2004). Both Cavender and colleagues (1999) and Parrott and Parrott (2015) examined female victims' representations on television, and neither study focused on a specific type of victim (although violent victimization was overrepresented in both studies). Slakoff and Brennan (2017) examined front-page newspaper accounts of female victims of various crimes. The current study examined front-page newspaper stories about female victims, regardless of crime type, specific offender, or victim location.

Moreover, as summarized in Table 2.2, a few of the existing studies focused on one victim (Howard & Prividera, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Stillman, 2007) or on victims of one racial group (Lobasz, 2008; Meyers, 2004), which cannot allow for comparisons to be made across victims of varying races/ethnicities. For example, Meyers (2004) focused solely on media representations of black women, while Stillman (2007) largely discussed media accounts of Jessica Lunsford (a murdered young, white girl) and her enormous amount of coverage. Table 2.2 also shows that three studies focused on coverage of the victimization of Jessica Lynch, a white female soldier (Howard & Prividera, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Lobasz, 2008). In addition, a few studies examined differences in

portrayals for white and Aboriginal or Native American female victims (Gilchrist, 2010; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Pitman, 2002). In two of these studies, most of the victims were Aboriginal, which limited the comparisons that could be made between Aboriginal women and white women (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Pitman, 2002). Gilchrist (2010) compared news coverage of three white women and three Aboriginal women. She found Aboriginal women received less coverage and their stories were less inclined to appear on the front page. Taylor (2009) did not examine whether victim-blame narratives in stories about female victims of domestic homicide differed depending on the victim's race/ethnicity.

Table 2.2 further shows that few researchers have compared the narrative content for white versus minority victims. It is important to add that only Slakoff and Brennan (2017) and Parrott and Parrott (1999) analyzed whether differences noted between white and minority female victims were statistically meaningful at the bivariate level; none of the studies examined differences at the multivariate level. Slakoff and Brennan (2017) found non-white (i.e., Latina and black victims grouped together) female victims were significantly more likely to be described as bad people, risk-takers, and as living within unsafe environments, while white women were significantly more likely to have media attention mentioned in their stories and to be described within safe environments. Parrott and Parrott (2015) found white female victims in fictional crime dramas were significantly more likely to be attacked by a stranger than other victims in the crime dramas.

Other researchers have compared representations of white and black female victims (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Moody et al., 2009).

Ar dovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald (2002) found white female rape victims (versus black female rape victims) had a higher percentage of sympathetic statements in their stories, while Moody and colleagues (2009) found two missing white women received substantially more news coverage than two missing black victims. Cavender and colleagues (1999) attempted to examine differences in story content for white, black, and Latina female victims on *America's Most Wanted*, but only one Latina victim was found in their sample.

In short, sufficient attention has not been given to explorations of media portrayals of white versus minority female victims, and no research to date has compared media accounts of white, black, and Latina female victims, although Parrott and Parrott (2015) indicated the need for research in this area. As critical race feminists would argue, minority women are marginalized and dehumanized in America (Higginbotham, 1983). Therefore, I expected coverage of the victimization experience of black and Latina females to differ from the coverage afforded white female victims.

I also recognized that the experiences of minority women and girls are not universal, as discussed by critical race feminist scholars (Belknap, 2014; Ortega, 2016; Potter, 2013) and evidenced by differential stereotypes for females of differing races/ethnicities. I, therefore, expected to find differences in the ways in which black and Latina female victims are portrayed. This theoretical expectation has not been adequately explored in the empirical literature. The invisibility of Latino/as in media analyses has been discussed by a few scholars (Chavez, 2003; Vargas, 2000). Research shows Latinos are underrepresented in television roles (Atkin, 1992; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000), but no study to date has examined Latina victim's portrayals in media outlets. As Villanueva

(1999) argues, intellectual inquiries would benefit if scholars paid more attention to the treatment of Latinas.

A Closer Look at Narrative Themes about Female Victims

McIntosh (1998) argued white females benefit from a “white privilege,” and I believed this privilege would result in white females receiving more sympathetic treatment from media outlets than their minority counterparts.⁸ As such, I believed an analysis of whether differences exist in stories about white, black, and Latina female victims was warranted. As acknowledged in the discussion above (and in Table 2.2), white females are often portrayed or viewed as “ideal” or “worthy” victims (Christie, 1986; Gekoski et al., 2012; Madriz, 1997; Parrott & Parrott, 2015; Sorenson et al, 1998), and flowery language is often used to describe their wonderful lives (Wanzo, 2008; see also Gilchrist, 2010; Moody et al., 2009) and their good nature (Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). Moreover, as Edwards (2017) put it, “religious iconography...quite literally represents whiteness as divine” (para. 4). Importantly, ideal victims illicit large amounts of sympathy from media outlets (Jeanis & Powers, 2016), are those attacked by strangers (Parrott & Parrott, 2015),⁹ and are viewed as chaste and innocent (Meyers, 1997; Berns, 2004).

The “ideal” victim stereotype is closely linked to the “damsel in distress” or “women in peril” themes present in many stories about women (particularly, in stories about women within warzones). For example, various news agencies portrayed Jessica

⁸ Ammons (1995) argues that “white women have been deemed good women as long as they stay within the prescribed limits of their proper roles. Black women have never had the benefit of that presumption” (p. 1041).

⁹ In Britain, killings by strangers were common in “mega cases” (Soothill et al., 2002). In a U.S. study, victims who were killed by strangers were overrepresented in *Los Angeles Times* coverage (Sorenson et al., 1998).

Lynch—a white female soldier who was taken hostage by the enemy and later saved by her male compatriots—as the prototypical damsel in distress (Kumar, 2004; Lobasz, 2008). According to Holland (2006), Lynch was portrayed as a stereotypical feminine woman—diminutive, nonaggressive, and fond of children. Lynch loved curling her hair, wearing skirts, and looking pretty (Holland, 2006). She was described as a heroic angel (Kumar, 2004) and as a “good” and “virtuous” woman (Lobasz, 2008, p. 319). As a damsel in distress, Jessica Lynch was placed in a vulnerable situation and needed saving from enemy, nonwhite men (Kumar, 2004; Lobasz, 2008). Indeed, Lynch ultimately needed to be saved by U.S. Special Operations Forces (Lobasz, 2008). Lobasz (2008) noted that when a woman is in distress or peril, she is viewed as someone who is weak and virtuous and who may be “easily sullied by the horrors of the world” (p. 320). After being saved, Lynch’s civilian life was portrayed as a “fairytale... the damsel in distress had returned home to marry her prince and live happily ever after in fairy tale land” (Kumar, 2004, p. 37). Such a narrative coincides with stereotypical notions that good women become wives and mothers (Ammons, 1995).

As indicated, there is a good girl/bad girl dichotomy (sometimes called the innocent/complicit dichotomy) that appears in news stories (Gilchrist, 2010; see also Madriz, 1997; McLaughlin, 1991; Meyers, 1997). Madriz’s (1997) “typology of female victims” pits “the innocent victim” versus “the culpable victim” (p. 88), which is summarized in the table on the next page:

Table 2.3. Madriz’s “Innocent” Versus “Culpable” Victim Chart

The Innocent Victim	The Culpable Victim
She is a respectable woman.	She is a woman of dubious reputation.
She was attacked while engaged in a respectable activity.	She was attacked while engaged in an activity considered improper for women.
The place and time of her attack are considered appropriate for a woman.	She was at a place and/or a time considered unsafe for women.
She wears conservative or modest clothes and jewelry.	She dresses in a provocative or revealing manner, improper for a decent woman.
She associates with other respectable men and women.	She associates with the wrong crowd.
She was attacked by an “ideal criminal,” a stranger.	She was attacked by one of her disreputable friends or by a disreputable stranger.

Adopted from Madriz, 1997, p. 88

Put another way, good girls are completely innocent, while bad girls are somehow “asking for it” (Berns, 2004; Collins, 2016; Meyers, 1997). In line with these ideas, Meyers (1997) acknowledged that females who are not “ideal” are often portrayed as being somehow responsible for their own plight—generally because of substance abuse, inattentiveness to their surroundings, association with criminal friends or partners, and/or poor decision-making (see also Collins, 2016; Larcombe, 2002). Moreover, Collins’s (2016) study of media accounts of male and female victims showed the difference in narratives was “greatest between those victims who were seen as good and deserving over the victims who were bad or not deserving of our sympathy” (p. 307).

As acknowledged in the previous section of this literature review, some research on differential news coverage found minority female victims are often portrayed as somehow responsible for their own victimization (Meyers, 1997; Slakoff & Brennan,

2017). As hooks (1992) aptly stated, “the socially constructed image of innocent white womanhood relies on the continued production of the racist/sexist sexual myth that black women are not innocent and never can be” (p. 159). This idea is consistent with Funderburk’s (2009) notion that white people are the baseline for goodness and that minority people fall below this baseline.

In line with good girl/bad girl and innocent/complicit dichotomies, Bjornstrom and colleagues (2010) discussed the devaluation of minorities in media coverage. To clarify, they argued the victimization of minorities represent less harm to the community at large than the victimization of white people (Bjornstrom et al., 2010, p. 276; see also Ammons, 1995; Wanzo, 2008). Similarly, Ammons (1995) argued black females are not valued in the same ways as white females. In addition, Gilchrist (2010) noted “‘good’ women are seen as innocent and worth saving or avenging,” whereas bad women are not (p. 375). Given the minority devaluation framework, it is unsurprising that minorities are underrepresented as victims in the media—despite their higher rates of victimization than white people (Johnstone et al., 1994; Sorenson et al., 1998). Simply stated, the justice system values white victims over black victims (Bjornstrom et al., 2010, p. 276; see also Gilchrist, 2010).

The good girl/bad girl and innocent/complicit dichotomies are important to one’s understanding of how females are differentially portrayed in crime story narratives. As Gilchrist (2010) stated, “in order for there to be a ‘bad,’ ‘unworthy,’ ‘impure,’ ‘disreputable’ woman/victim— there must simultaneously be a ‘good,’ ‘worthy,’ ‘pure,’ and ‘respectable’ woman/victim against whom she is judged” (p. 375). Moreover, the good girl/bad girl and innocent/dichotomies closely align with Greer’s (2007) “hierarchy

of victimization” (p. 23). In this hierarchy, ideal and innocent victims are at top while bad and risk-taking victims are at the bottom (Greer, 2007).

Along the same vein, Slakoff and Brennan (2017) found several themes in their study of female victims. Specifically, white female victims were more likely to have media attention mentioned in their stories, to be described as residing within a safe environment, and to be attacked by a predator stranger than Latina/black (grouped into one category) female victims. In comparison, Latina/black female victims were significantly more likely to be described as “bad,” risk-taking, and living within unsafe environments. This dissertation expands upon Slakoff and Brennan’s (2017) work through an examination of whether other themes appeared in news stories and whether the themes differentially appeared in stories about black, white, and Latina female victims. Moreover, unlike Slakoff and Brennan’s (2017) study, multivariate models were estimated as part of this dissertation.

In terms of the possible importance of all of this for criminal justice processing, Jordan (2008) argued police officers’ responses to victimization differed based upon the victim’s behavior and clothing. Moreover, in another study, Spohn, Beichner, and Davis-Frenzel (2001) found prosecutors were more likely to prosecute offenders when there were no questions about the victim’s risk-taking behavior at the time of the incident. Moreover, Lafree and his fellow researchers (1985) found jurors were less likely to bring a guilty verdict in a rape trial when the victim was black; in fact, “one juror argued for acquittal on the grounds that a girl her age from ‘that kind of neighborhood’ probably wasn’t a virgin anyway” (p. 402).

Visual Analyses of Female Crime Victims

Only two researchers to date have examined whether photographs were more prevalent in stories about white female victims. Gilchrist (2010) found white women were more likely to have photographs included with their stories, but she did not report whether the difference was statistically meaningful. Slakoff and Brennan (2017) found the use of photographs in stories about white female victims did not statistically differ from the use of photographs in stories about non-white (i.e., black/Latina) female victims. No research to date has examined the inclusion of photographs in stories about Latina female victims.

Given the limited research in this area, further exploration was necessary because readers “enter the page through the dominant photo” (The Poynter Institute, 1991, p. 25; see also Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In addition, most readers do not read the full text of a story (The Poynter Institute, 1991). Newsmakers use photographs to pull-in readers, give vital information, and hopefully encourage the reader to continue reading (Gibson & Zillman, 2000; The Poynter Institute, 1991; Rossler et al., 2011). Furthermore, Abraham and Appiah (2006) found readers were more likely to recall a story’s imagery rather than a story’s narrative. Indeed, photographs may convey vivid, vital information to the reader without the reader needing to engage with the story text (Greer, 2007). Moreover, Wanta (1988) argued that an editor’s decision to include a front-page photograph signaled to readers that a given story was important. For this reason, Wanta (1988) advised journalists to include accompanying photographs only for the most important stories. Given the salience of a story’s photograph, I believed an analysis of differential photographic portrayals of white, black, and Latina female victims was warranted. Based

on critical race feminist thought, I anticipated stories about white female victims would be more likely to contain front-page photographs than stories about black and Latina female victims.

Research Propositions

In this study, I analyzed front-page stories from seven U.S. newspapers—*The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Houston Chronicle*, *The Arizona Republic*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Miami Herald*. These newspapers were chosen because their respective cities have sufficiently large minority populations. Based on my study's focus, I examined differences in news portrayals for white, black, and Latina female victims. As previously stated, critical race feminism provided the basis for my expectation that white female victims would be treated differently (and better) in the news than their black and Latina counterparts. Indeed, based on prior research and critical race feminism, I expected to find more front-page stories about white female victims than Latina and black female victims, and I anticipated white female victims would receive more follow-up coverage.¹⁰ Moreover, I expected to find more national/international stories about white female victims and anticipated more of the stories about white females contained photographs. I further predicted stories about white female victims would be more likely to contain sympathetic themes and result in sympathetic overall narratives than stories about either Latina or black female victims, whereas stories about Latina and black female victims would be more likely to contain

¹⁰ This study is not a study of newsworthiness. All the stories examined within this dissertation are, by definition, newsworthy because all appeared on the front page, which meant that editors made conscious decisions to give each story newspaper prominence (Shoemaker, 2006).

negative themes and result in overall narratives that were unsympathetic for the victim.¹¹ Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald (2002) described sympathetic statements as those that make the reader like the victim or want to protect her, which they argue garner sympathy. Sympathetic statements serve as counterpoints to blaming or devaluing statements (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Slakoff & Brennan, 2017). I also expected to find differences in stories about black and Latina female victims because critical race feminists argue the experiences of one minority group are distinct from those of other minority groups (Ortega, 2016, Potter, 2013).

¹¹ My use of the word “sympathetic” is consistent with other discussions of media coverage of crime victims (see for example Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Jeanis & Powers, 2016; Slakoff & Brennan, 2017).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology for my study of newspaper coverage of white, black, and Latina female victims. This chapter begins with a discussion of my selection of newspapers and the reasons why front-page stories were selected for analysis. From there, I describe my study's mixed-methods analysis. Specifically, I discuss Altheide's (1996) approach to qualitative document analysis, which guided the coding of variables for quantitative analysis. This chapter also provides the distributions for my independent variables (i.e., the primary independent variable—race/ethnicity—and several possible covariates) and dependent variables. From there, I discuss the bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques I employed. The results generated from the quantitative analyses (presented in Chapter 4) determined whether portrayals of white, black, and Latina female victims statistically differed. In this chapter, I also explain that excerpts from stories were used to impart meaning to my quantitative findings. This chapter concludes with my six research hypotheses, which were formed based on critical race feminist thought and findings from previous empirical studies.

Data

For this study, I examined front-page stories from the calendar year 2006 about female victims of all ages from seven U.S. newspapers—*The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Miami Herald*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Arizona Republic*. Put another way, all front-page stories about female victims from January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006 were examined. These 2006 stories were initially compiled as part of a larger study of media coverage of offenders

(Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Vandenberg et al., 2013), but some of the victim stories were only recently coded. To be more specific, Slakoff and Brennan (2017) recently coded and analyzed female victim stories from 2006 from *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Houston Chronicle*. For this dissertation, I added and coded stories from 2006 about female victims from the *Miami Herald* and *The Washington Post* (i.e., stories that had been compiled as part of the larger study on female offenders but were never coded) and stories from 2006 from *The Arizona Republic* (which had not been compiled or previously coded).

During the data-coding process, I added several variables to Slakoff and Brennan's (2017) database regarding female victims in the news. These new variables emerged during the coding process for this dissertation. I discuss this process in more detail below. Moreover, I argue these stories from 2006 matter (even though they are now a decade old), because race and ethnicity have been important topics in American culture for decades (Gans, 2005) and racism and ethnocentrism have not gone away.

I chose front-page stories for this dissertation because they attract the greatest number of readers (Buckler & Travis, 2005) and because many people (including those who do not subscribe to a paper) may view a newspaper's front page while going about their daily activities. For example, the front pages of newspapers may be viewed in convenience store check-out lines, in coffee shops, outside of supermarkets in newspaper vending machines, and in hotel lobbies (just to name a few of many possible locations). In other words, one need not subscribe to a paper to see its front-page content. Moreover, the front-page stories were chosen because they represent the most newsworthy stories of the day; someone within the newsroom—namely, editors and/or journalists—decided

these stories deserved prominent coverage on the front page (Lundman, 2003; Shoemaker, 2006).

For six of the seven newspapers, microfiche archives were used because such a medium reproduces the exact layout of a newspaper and includes all the photographs that accompany stories. Stories from *The Arizona Republic* are available through their online archive, which includes the full newspaper layout and the exact placement of story photographs. The LexisNexis and ProQuest mediums were unusable for this dissertation because they rarely contain story photographs due to copyright laws.

Despite the emergence of online news, front-page newspaper stories remain important. Indeed, in a content analysis of three major newspapers, Greer and Mensing (2004) found print and online newspapers contained similar lead stories for the first 12 hours of the day. However, unlike print newspapers, online news outlets can update and change their lead stories several times a day (Greer & Mensing, 2004). Despite the emergence of online news, Rosenstiel, Mitchell, Purcell, and Raine (2011) found, “among all adults, newspapers were cited as the most relied-upon source or tied for the most relied upon for crime” (p. 14). Moreover, the creatives at Stanton Communications (2013) argue newspapers capture important snapshots of history—“it is an accurate reflection of that moment in time—what we were all thinking, doing and experiencing” (para. 7). Furthermore, Chermak (1994) argued stories in daily newspapers are often represented on the nightly television news, and both television and print newsmakers look to each other for their news stories.

The seven newspapers selected for this dissertation’s analyses feature stories that are both local and national/international in scope. All front-page stories that featured an

actual or alleged victimization of a woman or female child were coded. The newspapers were purposively selected for several reasons. First, the newspapers represent various regions in the United States. Second, these newspapers are from cities with sufficiently large minority populations. Third, all seven papers are highly circulated, which means front-page stories are likely to be viewed by many (BurrellsLuce, 2006).¹² In addition, all seven newspapers are considered broadsheet (i.e., serious) journalistic enterprises (as opposed to “tabloid” newspapers).¹³ This is evident by the fact that *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Chicago Tribune* rank within the top 10 most reputable newspapers in the country based on *Washington Post* rankings (de Vise, 2011). These reputable newspapers are important to include in this study because Protes and McCombs (1991) found elite newspapers influence coverage in local newspapers and television news programs.

Methodological Approach

This dissertation utilized a mixed-methods approach, which meant I qualitatively *and* quantitatively analyzed front-page newspaper stories about female victims. First, the stories were analyzed using Altheide’s (1996) approach to qualitative document analysis. Based on Altheide’s (1996) methodology, stories were critically evaluated and coded numerous times; variables noted to be important in other media-based research were coded and so too were new, emergent themes. The data-coding process necessitated a

¹² As noted, the news stories were from the 2006 calendar year. During 2006, all these newspapers except the *Miami Herald* were among the top 12 most circulated newspapers in the country. The *Miami Herald* was number 27 on the list. This paper was included because of its geographical location (i.e., a paper from the southeastern region of the United States) and because of its city’s relatively large Latino/a population.

¹³ I avoided tabloid newspapers because tabloid stories often include sensationalistic and overly gruesome details to garner readers (Connell, 1998).

continuous re-evaluation of the news stories until no new themes were identified. This method is discussed in greater detail below.

Following the discussion of Altheide's (1996) approach below, I provided the distributions for the independent and dependent variables. And, as explained, I used these variables to quantitatively analyze differences in news story portrayals of white, black, and Latina victims. My use of quantitative statistical techniques allowed for a determination of whether the differences I uncovered were statistically meaningful (beyond random variation). And, per Altheide's (1996) approach, I used excerpts from news stories to more fully explain my findings (presented in Chapter 4). Put another way, story excerpts were used to provide context and meaning for my quantitative findings.

Qualitative document analysis and coding.

Altheide's (1996) approach to qualitative document analysis provided the methodological foundation for this work. A qualitative analysis of documents "follows a recursive and reflective movement" between concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, analysis, and interpretation (Altheide, 1996. p. 16). Such an approach emphasizes the importance of emergent themes through an analytical and non-rigid method. Indeed, there is an expectation that already-established variables will be important, and there is an expectation that new, emergent themes will materialize (Altheide, 1996). In line with Altheide's (1996) method, I read and re-read stories multiple times in order to thoroughly code them.

Based on my study's goals, I coded for the race/ethnicity of the female victim, the number of stories in general, the number of stories with repeated coverage, the number of stories with a national/international focus, and whether photographs accompanied a story.

Furthermore, I examined whether the front-page photograph portrayed the female victim herself. Then, consistent with Altheide's (1996) technique, important variables from prior content analyses of textual narratives were coded. For example, the presence or absence of the themes of "good girl," "bad girl," "risk-taker," and "innocent victim" were coded. Moreover, given Slakoff and Brennan's (2017) study, I also coded for the "media attention mentioned" theme and the "unsafe" and "safe" environment themes, among others.

Notable covariates were also coded. To be more specific, I coded for victim age, offender age, offender race, offender gender, whether the victimization was interracial, the victim-offender relationship, crime type, location of the victimization, whether there were multiple victims, whether there were multiple offenders, and whether the newspaper was published in a liberal-voting city. (A more detailed explanation of these covariates is provided later in this chapter.) In line with Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken's (2002) guidelines to content analysis within mass communications research, a random sample of 10 percent of this dataset's stories were coded by a second coder to assess (and assure) interrater reliability. The interrater reliability for the two coders was approximately 96% across all variables. In cases in which the coders disagreed, coding rationales were discussed until a consensus was reached.

Descriptive statistics: Independent variables of interest & covariates.

The female victim's race/ethnicity was the independent variable of interest in this study. A victim's race/ethnicity was determined in a variety of ways. In some stories, the front-page or inside photograph of the victim or her family members depicted her

race/ethnicity. In other stories, the victim's race was clearly stated or insinuated (e.g., the victim is described as only speaking Spanish and/or had recently moved to the United States from Mexico). In rare cases, the victim's surname was used to infer her race/ethnicity (e.g., a child with Latin surname—such as Chavez—was coded as Latina). Importantly, for the purposes of this study, female victims were categorized into only one group. If photographs were used to determine a female victim's race/ethnicity, then the categorization was often based on her skin tone. Importantly, research suggests that viewers who see dark skin will categorize that person into a “black” racial category regardless of their true race/ethnicity (Maddox & Gray, 2002). Of course, it is possible that a victim is of mixed race. Moreover, I acknowledge that race and ethnicity are not always mutually exclusive. In all, a total of 532 crime stories about female victims appeared on the front pages of the seven newspapers. The female's race/ethnicity was not discernable in 217 stories.

For this study, only the stories where the female victim's race/ethnicity was determined to be white, Latina, or black female were analyzed ($n = 266$) because there were too few stories about women of other ethnicities for analysis.¹⁴ In addition, these are the three largest racial/ethnic groupings in the United States (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2017). Importantly, in the case of multiple victims, the primary victim in the story (i.e., the one written about the most) was the one coded. In rare instances in which there were two or more victims and the victims were written about equally, story elements for the first discussed victim were coded. Moreover,

¹⁴ Slakoff and Brennan's (2017) study examined 131 stories about white, black, and Latina female victims. This dissertation examines over two times as many stories. In 49 stories coded for this dissertation, the victim's race or ethnicity was something other than white, black, or Latina. The “other” races/ethnicities included Middle Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, Philippina, and Native American.

this study's inclusion of Latina female victims is crucial for three reasons. First, no other study has examined media representations of Latina female victims as their own separate group. Second, critical race feminist scholars call for the analysis of multiple minority groups (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Ortega, 2016). Third, the Latino/a population is growing quickly, and they now represent the second-largest racial or ethnic group in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2017).

As shown by Table 3.1, there were 125 front-page stories about white female victims (47%), 77 stories about black female victims (28.9%), and 64 stories about Latina female victims (24.1%).

Table 3.1. Codes and Descriptive Statistics for the Independent Variables (n = 266)

Variables	Code	N	%
<i>Primary Independent Variable</i>			
Victim Race/Ethnicity			
White	1/0 ^a	125	47.0
Black	2/0 ^a	77	28.9
Latina	3/0	64	24.1
<i>Covariates</i>			
Minor Victim			
No	0	156	58.6
Yes	1	110	41.4
Young Adult Offender (18-29)			
No	0	193	72.6
Yes	1	73	27.4
White Offender			
No	0	200	75.2
Yes	1	66	24.8
Male Offender			
No	0	89	33.5
Yes	1	177	66.5
Interracial Victimization			
No	0	200	75.2
Yes	1	66	24.8
Stranger Offender			
No	0	192	72.2
Yes	1	74	27.8
Murder Offense			
No	0	91	34.2
Yes	1	175	65.8

Table 3.1 continues next page.

Table 3.1. (continued.) Codes and Descriptive Statistics for the Independent Variables (n = 266)

Variables	Code	N	%
Victimization At/Near Home			
No	0	171	64.3
Yes	1	95	35.7
One Victim			
No	0	131	49.2
Yes	1	135	50.8
One Offender			
No	0	129	48.5
Yes	1	137	51.5
Liberal Paper			
No	0	142	53.4
Yes	1	124	46.6

a. The code is “0” when it is the excluded category in the multinomial regression.

Table 3.1 also shows the distribution for the covariates, which are included as control variables in the multivariate analyses presented in the next chapter.¹⁵ The age of the victim was coded into a dichotomous minor versus non-minor (i.e., adult) variable. In 110 stories (41.4%), the victim was a minor 17 years old or younger. In 156 stories (58.6%), the victim was an adult 18 years old or older.

Regarding offender characteristics, the offender’s age, race, and gender were also coded. As noted in Table 3.1, offender age was operationalized as a dichotomous variable—young adult offender versus non-young adult offender. In 73 stories (27.4%), the offender was a young adult between the ages of 18 and 29 years old. In 193 stories (72.6%), the offender was of a different (or unspecified) age. The offender’s race was coded into a dichotomous white versus non-white variable. In 66 stories (24.8%), the offender was white. In 200 stories (75.2%), the offender was non-white (or the race/ethnicity of the offender was not stated). The offender’s gender was operationalized

¹⁵ Due to lack of statistical power (i.e., very small numbers in certain cells), many of my covariates were collapsed down from more refined categories. The original coding of these covariates can be seen in Appendix 1.

as a dichotomous variable – male versus all others. Indeed, 177 stories featured a male offender (66.5%), while 89 stories (33.5%) either featured a female offender, female and male offenders working in tandem, or the gender of the offender was not specified.

I also examined whether the victimization was interracial (using a dichotomous variable). The victimization was interracial (i.e., the victim and offender were of differing races/ethnicities) in 66 (24.8%) stories. In 200 stories (75.2%), the victim and offender were of the same race or the offender's race was not stated. I also coded for the victim and offender's relationship via a dichotomous variable. The victim and offender were specified as being strangers in 74 of the stories (27.8%). Regarding the other stories, the victim and offender knew one another or the relationship between them was unknown in 192 (72.2%) of the stories.

Crime type was operationalized as a dichotomous variable: stories about murder versus stories about a crime other than murder. The victim was reported to have been murdered in 175 (n= 65.8%) of the crime stories. Importantly, I coded for crime type based on the most serious offense noted within a story. For example, if a woman was physically assaulted and murdered, the crime was coded as murder rather than physical assault. Importantly, out of 266 crime stories, 254 (95.5%) featured a violent crime (not reflected in Table 3.1). The high incidence of violent crime stories I found on the front page is unsurprising given that newsworthy stories often feature violent crimes: As the adage goes, "if it bleeds, it leads" (Lundman 2003, p. 358; see also Chermak, 1994). But, as shown by Table 3.1 (and in more detail in Appendix 1), not all stories featured a murder victim.

The location of the victimization was operationalized as a dichotomous variable (comparing victimization at/near the home versus all other locations). The victimization was reported to have occurred at or near the victim's home in 95 of the stories (35.7%). The victimization was reported to have occurred elsewhere in 171 of the stories (64.3%). I also examined whether there was only "one victim" or only "one offender." One victim was described in 135 stories (50.8%), and two or more victims were discussed in 131 stories (49.2%).¹⁶ As noted in Table 3.1, one specified offender was responsible for the victimization in 137 stories (51.5%), whereas multiples offenders (or an unspecified number of offenders) were described in 129 stories (48.5%).

Moreover, I also controlled for whether the newspaper's headquarters was in a liberal-voting city (versus a city with a mixed conservative and liberal political profile). Papers produced in liberal locations disseminated 124 front-page stories about female victims (46.6%), while papers produced in mixed-political cities generated 142 front-page stories about female victims (53.4%). To create this variable, stories from *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post* were grouped into the "liberal paper" category. Indeed, The Bay Area Center for Voting Research (2004) found that 79% of the voters in New York City, 74% of the voters in Los Angeles, 81% of the voters in Chicago, and 90% of the voters in Washington, D.C., considered themselves to be "liberal" at the time of the 2004 presidential election.

According to The Bay Area Center for Voting Research (2004), voters in the other three

¹⁶ As stated earlier, the primary victim was coded for each story. In rare cases, if multiple victims received a similar amount of coverage (i.e., there was no clear primary victim), then story elements for the first victim noted in the story were coded. Importantly, even in stories with multiple victims, there was usually a primary victim. For example, during the Jill Carroll kidnapping, her male Iraqi translator was killed. This was, therefore, coded as a story with multiple victims. However, these stories rarely mentioned anything about him other than the fact he died (in fact, many stories did not include his name). Carroll is clearly the primary victim in these stories.

cities (Houston, Phoenix, Miami) were much closer to a 50/50 liberal and conservative split (46% liberal, 47% liberal, and 55% liberal, respectively).

Descriptive statistics: Dependent variables.

Table 3.2 on the next page presents the distribution for this study's dependent variables. First, two measures of coverage intensity were examined— (1) whether a story was repeated and (2) whether the victimization received local versus national/international coverage. My operationalization of repeated stories is derived from Moody and colleagues' work (2009); they tallied how many stories in their dataset were about the same victim. As shown, 144 of the 266 stories (54.1 percent) represented a repeated story/victim. In other words, the victim was the focus of another story in the dataset (i.e., she received coverage in more than one story). The coding of stories that received national/international coverage is based on Jeanis and Powers's (2016) work. They examined whether differences existed in the extent to which stories about victims were national (vs. local) in scope. For a story to have been coded as a local story, the story's events had to take place in the local area (e.g., a murder in Miami featured in the *Miami Herald*). In order for a story to have been coded as a national or international story, the story's events had to take place outside the local area (e.g., a kidnapping in New York featured in *The Arizona Republic*). As seen in Table 3.2 on the next page, 115 of the stories featured a victimization that received national/international coverage (43.2%).

Table 3.2. Codes and Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variables (n = 266)

Dependent Variables	Code	N	%
<i>Non-narrative Elements</i>			
Repeated stories			
No	0	122	45.9
Yes	1	144	54.1
National/international			
No	0	151	56.8
Yes	1	115	43.2
Any front photograph			
No	0	97	36.5
Yes	1	169	63.5
Front photo of victim			
No	0	168	63.2
Yes	1	98	36.8
<i>Unsympathetic Narrative Elements</i>			
Bad person			
No	0	240	90.2
Yes	1	26	9.8
Risk-taking			
No	0	197	74.1
Yes	1	69	25.9
Unsafe environment			
No	0	149	56.0
Yes	1	117	44.0
Expected victimization			
No	0	219	82.3
Yes	1	47	17.7
<i>Sympathetic Narrative Elements</i>			
Good person			
No	0	203	76.3
Yes	1	63	23.7
Innocent			
No	0	188	70.7
Yes	1	78	29.3
Media attention mentioned			
No	0	178	66.9
Yes	1	88	33.1
Preyed upon by stranger			
No	0	213	80.1
Yes	1	53	19.9
Safe environment			
No	0	244	91.7
Yes	1	22	8.3
Religiosity			
No	0	246	92.5
Yes	1	20	7.5

Table 3.2 continues next page

Table 3.2. (continued). Codes and Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variables (n = 266)

Dependent Variables	Code	N	%
Female in Peril Far from Home			
No	0	240	90.2
Yes	1	26	9.8
Random Nature of Victimization			
No	0	239	89.8
Yes	1	27	10.2
Strong Interpersonal Relationships			
No	0	193	72.6
Yes	1	73	27.4
Detailed account of victimization			
No	0	183	68.8
Yes	1	83	31.2
<i>Summary Measure (Overall Story Narrative)</i>			
Unsympathetic overall	1/0 ^a	35	13.2
Neutral	2	117	44.0
Sympathetic overall	3/0 ^a	114	42.9

a. The code is “0” when it is the excluded category in the multinomial regression.

Table 3.2 also shows the distribution for the two variables related to story photographs. Almost 64 percent of the stories contained a front-page photograph (n= 169), but only about 37 percent of these stories featured a front-page photograph of the victim (n= 98). As discussed earlier, front-page photographs are important because news readers often enter the story through the dominant photograph (The Poynter Institute, 1991) and because a reader’s recall of the story is often based on imagery and not text (Abraham & Appiah, 2006).

Now, I will transition to specific narrative themes I examined during the data-coding process. In some cases, unsympathetic and sympathetic narrative themes appeared in the reporter’s summary of what occurred and/or in descriptions of who the victim is/was. In other cases, individual themes appeared within direct quotations included in the

story. These quotations were often from a source close to the victim such as a family member.

Table 3.2 includes the distribution for the unsympathetic narrative themes of “bad person,” “risk-taking behavior,” and the “unsafe environment.” A story was coded as having a “bad person” narrative if the victim was described as a bad wife, a neglectful mother, criminal, callous, and/or otherwise deviant (e.g., a sex worker). For a victim to have been coded as a risk-taker, her news story had to portray her as making a reckless decision (e.g., associating with criminals, abusing drugs or alcohol). For a story to have been coded as having the “unsafe environment” theme, the story had to feature descriptions of a victim’s dangerous neighborhood or home environment. As shown in Table 3.2 above, only about 10 percent of the stories contained the “bad person” narrative ($n = 26$). Table 3.2 further shows that in about 26 percent of the stories, the victim engaged in some sort of risk-taking behavior ($n = 69$). Importantly, the “bad” person and risk-taking themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Moreover, 44 percent of the stories ($n = 117$) described the victim’s home or physical environment (i.e., her neighborhood) as somehow unsafe.

The new, emergent unsympathetic theme of the “expected victimization” was also coded for in this dissertation. The “expected victimization” theme was coded if there was reason for the victim—or those close to her—to expect she would be victimized. Importantly, the “expected victimization” theme is not mutually exclusive from the other unsympathetic themes. To provide an example, if a female was described as murdered at 3 a.m., while on drugs, and in the company of an abusive boyfriend, then this victimization appeared predictable, and the victim was portrayed as “bad” (i.e., criminal)

and “risk-taking.” Importantly, the “expected victimization” theme stands in stark contrast to the “unexpected victimization” theme described below. The “expected victimization” theme was present in 47 stories (17.7%).

Table 3.2 also shows the distributions for the sympathetic narrative themes I uncovered. Based on my review of the literature, I coded for stories that noted the victim’s innate goodness and the innocence of the female victim. The themes of “media attention mentioned,” “preyed upon by a predator stranger,” and “safe neighborhood” emerged in Slakoff and Brennan’s (2017) study, and these themes were coded for in this dissertation as well. The new themes of “religiosity,” “female in peril far from home” “random nature of the victimization,” “strong interpersonal relationships,” and “detailed account of victimization” emerged during the data coding process for this dissertation.

About 24 percent ($n = 63$) of the stories described the victim as a “good person.” Stories were coded as having “good person” narratives if the female was described as a respectable mother, a good wife, a stellar student, a respectable daughter (sister, friend), or as a caring individual. The theme of “innocence” was coded if the victim was described as naïve or harmless, and 78 stories featured such a narrative (29.3%).

As mentioned above, three sympathetic themes emerged during Slakoff and Brennan’s (2017) study, and they were also coded within this dissertation. To be more specific, I coded for “media attention mentioned” if the story provided a description of media coverage in the aftermath of the victimization. Media attention was mentioned in 88 of the stories (33.1%). In stories that contained the “preyed upon by a stranger” theme, the offender was described as a predator with a lengthy criminal history who attacked a stranger. Generally, these predators lied in wait for their unsuspecting victims.

About 20 percent of the stories ($n = 53$) described a predator stranger attacking an unsuspecting victim. The “safe” environment theme was coded if the victim was described within a safe neighborhood or home environment. In 22 stories, the victim’s “safe” environment is described (8.3%).

Five new sympathetic themes emerged during the coding process for this dissertation— “religiosity,” “female in peril far from home,” “random nature of the victimization,” “strong interpersonal relationships,” and the “detailed account of the victimization” themes. The theme of religiosity was coded if the victim’s belief in God, her attendance at church, or her devout spiritual nature was described within a story. As shown in Table 3.2, 20 stories (7.5%) described the victim’s religiosity. The “female in peril far from home” theme emerged in stories where the victim was described as falling into a precarious situation; in these stories, she was described as unable to escape or fight back because she was far from protection. This theme was present in 26 stories (9.8%). A story was coded as having the “random victimization” theme if the victimization could not have been anticipated (i.e., the female—or her family—could not see the victimization coming). This theme emerged in 27 stories (10.2%). The theme of “strong interpersonal relationships” was coded if the strong bond between the victim and her family, friends, and/or acquaintances was mentioned in the story. This theme was often presented as a discussion of the intense grief that the victim’s loved ones felt in the aftermath of the crime. The “detailed account of the victimization” theme was coded if the story included graphic descriptions of the victim’s plight and/or laid out the criminal event in a step-by-step manner. This theme appeared in 83 stories (31.2%).

Table 3.2 further provides the distribution for a summary measure of a story's overall victim narrative. The overall story narrative (OSN) variable measured the impression a reader would have of a female victim upon reading a newspaper story about her victimization. Put another way, I determined how the reader would feel about the victim after reading the story in its entirety. My coding of this theme (and all other themes) was verified by a second coder; the interrater reliability was approximately 96 percent across all variables. The OSN variable had the following three categories: (1) an overall unsympathetic victim narrative, (2) an overall neutral victim narrative, and (3) an overall sympathetic victim narrative. As shown in Table 3.2 above, only 35 stories resulted in unsympathetic overall victim narratives (13.2%). A much larger percentage of the stories (n = 117, 44%) resulted in overall narratives rated as "neutral." A similar number of stories (n = 114, 42.9%) produced overall sympathetic victim narratives.

The extent to which specific themes were present in stories rated as producing overall unsympathetic, neutral, and sympathetic narratives (OSN) is portrayed in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below. Importantly, a simple tabulation of the number of individual unsympathetic themes (i.e., "bad person," "risk-taking," etc.) relative to the number of sympathetic themes (i.e., "good person," "innocent," etc.) could not be used to create the OSN variable. To be clear, while a given theme may have been present in a story, it may not have been as pronounced as a different theme. Stated another way, one story may have contained two unsympathetic themes and one sympathetic theme, but the one sympathetic element may have outweighed the two unsympathetic elements in terms of its influence on the reader's overall perception of the female victim. Indeed, a problem with measurement validity would have materialized had I created a variable based solely

on the ratio of unsympathetic to sympathetic elements. The creation of a nominal variable with three distinct categories was warranted because the various themes are not weighted equally.

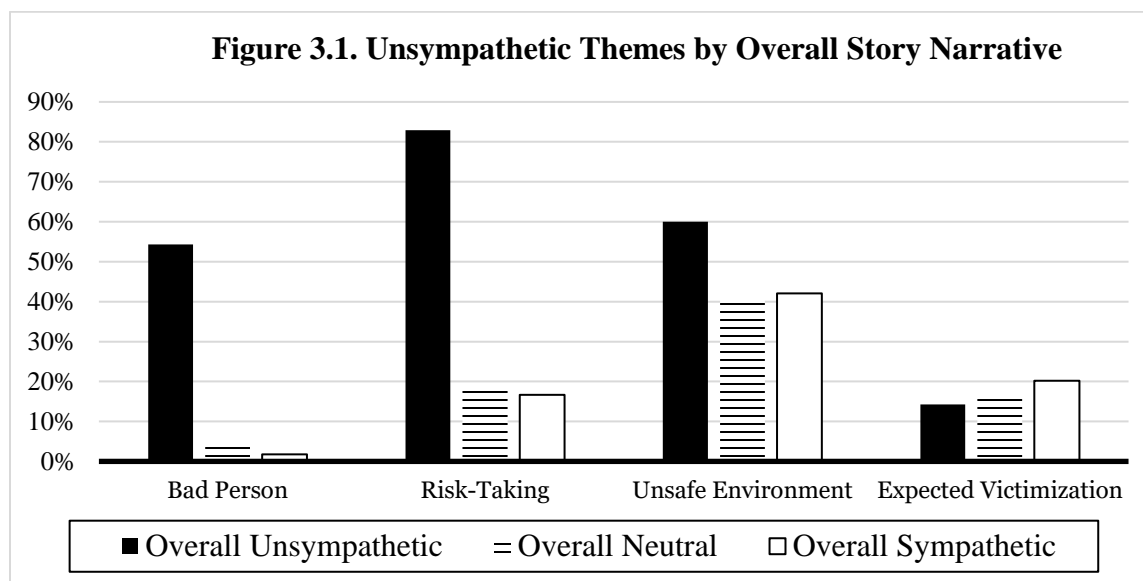
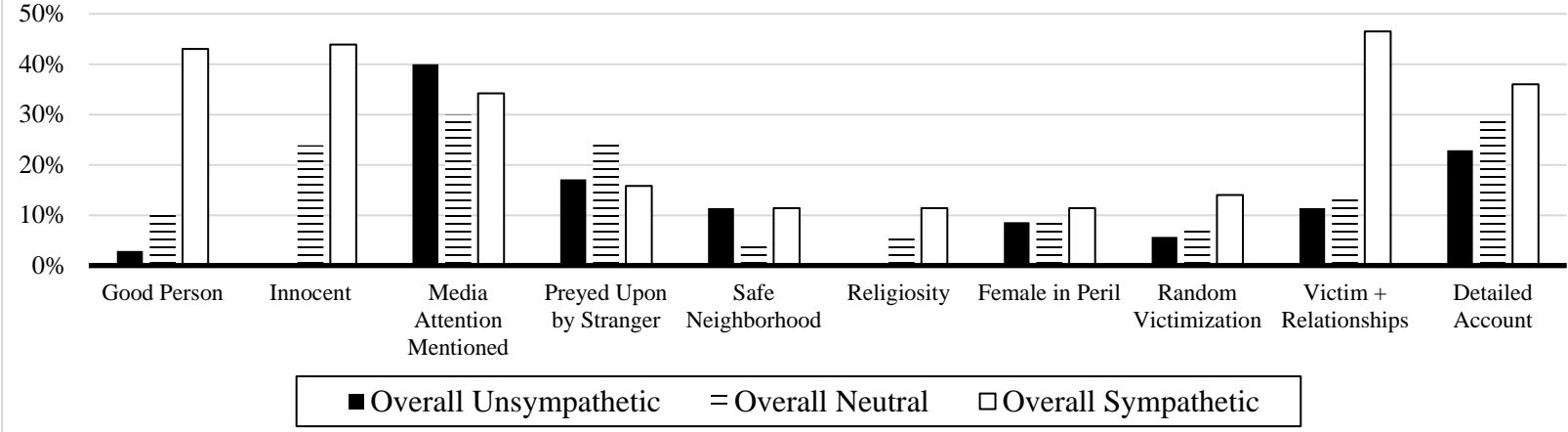


Figure 3.1 shows that a higher percentage of stories rated as unsympathetic overall included one or more unsympathetic themes. To be more specific, over 50% of the stories that were unsympathetic to the victim included the “bad girl” theme. In addition, over 80% included the risk-taking theme and about 60% included the unsafe environment theme. While some of these themes were also present in the stories that received overall neutral and sympathetic ratings, Figure 3.1 shows that the prevalence of specific unsympathetic themes was notably smaller in the stories rated as neutral or sympathetic of the victim. For example, less than 5% of the stories that were rated as having overall narratives that were sympathetic to the victim contained the “bad girl” element and less than 20% contained the “risk taking” element.

Instead, stories that were rated as sympathetic overall included a disproportionate number of sympathetic elements, as shown by Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2. Sympathetic Themes by Overall Story Narrative



As shown in Figure 3.2, over 40% of the stories with a sympathetic overall narrative contained the “good girl” and “innocent” themes, close to 50% had the “positive interpersonal relationships” theme, and over 35% had the “detailed account of the victimization” theme. Figure 3.2 also shows that hardly any of the stories deemed to produce overall unsympathetic narratives of the victim included elements in line with the “good girl” (less than 5%), “innocent person” (0%), or “positive interpersonal relationships” (11%) themes.

Analytical Techniques

My quantitative analyses began with a bivariate assessment of the relationship between a female victim’s race/ethnicity and several dependent variables, including repeated coverage, national/international coverage, accompaniment of any front-page photograph, and inclusion of a front-page photograph of the victim. The narrative themes of “bad person,” “any risk-taking behavior,” “unsafe environment,” “expected victimization,” “good person,” “innocent,” “media attention mentioned,” “attacked by a predator stranger,” “safe environment,” “religiosity,” “female in peril far from home,” “random victimization,” “strong interpersonal relationships,” and “detailed account of victimization” were also be assessed using bivariate analyses. Importantly, most studies of media depictions of female victims stop short of conducting *any* statistical analysis. In fact, only Slakoff and Brennan (2017) and Parrott and Parrott (1999) used bivariate analyses to examine whether differences found between white and minority female victims were statistically meaningful. In most of the bivariate analyses reported within this dissertation, Pearson’s chi-square analyses were used to assess whether findings were statistically significant (Faherty, 2008). In a few cases, I used Fisher’s Exact tests.

Fisher's Exact tests were used when expected cell counts are too low to complete Chi-square analyses (Kim, 2017).

I conducted a multivariate assessment of whether overall story narratives (OSN) differed for white, black, and Latina female victims. As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, no study to date has examined whether uncovered differences were statistically significant at the multivariate level. Given that the overall story narrative variable in this study contains three categories—overall unsympathetic narrative, overall neutral narrative, and overall sympathetic narrative—multinomial regression equations were estimated.

The equation for the multinomial logistic regression specification (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 1989, p. 217) is:

$$\pi_j(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{e^{g_j(\mathbf{x})}}{\sum_{k=0}^2 e^{g_k(\mathbf{x})}}$$

Under the specification in the formula above, the OSN was modeled for the three possible outcomes. Unsympathetic overall story narratives about the victim constituted my first reference category. Specifically, using this technique, the probability of a story having an unsympathetic overall victim narrative was compared to the probability of story having an overall sympathetic victim narrative; similarly, the probability of story having an overall unsympathetic victim narrative was compared to the probability of story having an overall neutral victim narrative. To determine whether a female victim's race/ethnicity predicted whether a story about her was likely to produce an overall neutral (rather than overall sympathetic) narrative, I re-ran the analyses with stories having an overall sympathetic narrative as the reference category. I estimated the equations first

with white female victims as the reference category and then with black female victims as the reference category.

When estimating the multinomial logistic regressions, I controlled for whether the victim was a minor and whether the offender was specified as being a young adult (18-29), white, and male. I also controlled for whether the victimization was interracial, if the offender was a stranger to the victim, if the victim was murdered, if the victimization occurred at/near the home, whether only one victim was described, whether only one offender was described, and if the paper was published in a location with a relatively large liberal voting presence. I controlled for the victim's age because Taylor and Sorenson (2002) found stories about child victims were more likely to appear on the front page than stories about adult victims. Consistent with this argument, Chermak (1994) argued stories about very young victims were particularly newsworthy. Moreover, young victims are often viewed as defenseless, which generally garners compassion from readers (Greer, 2007).

I also controlled for the offender's specified age, race/ethnicity, and gender because previous research suggests offender characteristics are important considerations for the newsworthiness of a story (Gruenewald et al., 2013). Moreover, young minority males are viewed as "typical" offenders (Creighton et al., 2014; Devine, 1989; Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Welch, 2007). One may predict that stories with stereotypical offenders may produce narratives that are inclined to be sympathetic of the victim. I controlled for the noted victim-offender relationship because stories featuring a stranger victimization tend to receive more coverage than crimes committed by offenders known to the victim (Paulsen, 2003). Moreover, Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald (2002) found

that victim blaming narratives for rape victims were *least* likely when the attack was perpetrated by a stranger. Because stranger victimization can rarely be anticipated, the reader feels sympathy for the victim.

I also controlled for crime type because violent crimes tend to receive considerable media attention (Chermak, 1994; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000), with homicides most often appearing in the news (Duwe, 2000). Hall and colleagues (1978) argued murder stories are overrepresented in the media because “violence represents a basic violation of the person,” and “the greatest personal crime is murder” (p. 68; as cited in Greer, 2007, p. 26). I speculated that stories featuring homicide victimization would result in more sympathetic coverage due to the “finality” of the injury, so I believed this was an important covariate to consider. Moreover, Greer (2007) argued people who commit murder are thought to be monstrous, a depiction that results in compassion for the victim. Furthermore, I controlled for the location of the victimization because Lupton (1999) found most people report feeling safe at home or near home and because Stanko (1988) argued people “associate public space with danger and private space with safety” (p. 75). For this reason, I believed differential news narratives could have resulted for females victimized at/near their home. Therefore, I included the location of the victimization as a control variable.

I further controlled for whether there were single victims and/or offenders (versus multiple) because Johnstone and colleagues (1994) found stories with multiple victims or offenders received more media coverage. Johnstone and colleagues (1994) speculated that such crimes received higher amounts of coverage because they were rare events. Crimes with more victims suggest that a crime was committed by a particularly brazen

offender; helpless victims could not escape this monster. Similarly, crimes with more offenders suggest ruthless and cunning motivations targeted against defenseless victims. In other words, the relative gravity of a crime or criminal is likely to be magnified when there are more victims and/or more offenders. I speculated that grievous offenses were prone to generate compassion for the victim. Alternatively, it is possible stories focused on multiple victims and multiple offenders are unable to humanize all the victims (due to space constraints in the paper); it is possible stories about one victim or one offender will devote more time to the individual victim's plight. For these reasons, I controlled for the number of victims and the number of offenders. Finally, I controlled for the location of the newspaper because it is possible that papers in liberal-voting cities will portray victims differently than papers in more mixed-political cities.

Hypotheses

The primary purpose of this dissertation was to determine the extent to which media portrayals differed by a female victim's race/ethnicity. Indeed, studies show white victims, in general, are more newsworthy than minority victims (Jeanis & Powers, 2016; Min & Feaster, 2010; Simmons & Woods, 2015). Moreover, critical race feminist scholars argue white female victims are afforded a white privilege (Higginbotham, 1983; McIntosh, 1998; Potter, 2013). Thus, I expected that a female victim's race/ethnicity would influence the extent of coverage her victimization received. To be more specific, I hypothesized:

H1: There would be more front-page stories about white female victims than stories about black and Latina female victims.

H2: There would be more repeated stories about white female victims than stories about black and Latina female victims.¹⁷

H3: There would be more national/international stories about white female victims than stories about black and Latina female victims.

H4: Stories about white female victims would be more likely to contain front-page photographs than stories about black and Latina female victims. Similarly, I hypothesized that stories about white female victims would be more likely to contain a front-page photograph of the victim than stories about black and Latina female victims.

Moreover, researchers have consistently noted that people of color are stereotyped in negative ways (Dixon, 2008; Devine, 1989), while white people are stereotyped in more positive ways (Crenshaw, 1988; Landrine, 1985). Regarding female victims' portrayals, some researchers have found that media narratives about white female victims tend to be more sympathetic than narratives about minority female victims (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Moody et al., 2009; Slakoff & Brennan, 2017). These findings are very much in line with critical race feminist thought, in that white female victims are treated differently than their minority counterparts because minority females battle racism and sexism simultaneously while white females do not (Potter, 2013). Based on previous research and critical race feminist thought, I expected there would be narrative differences in the stories about white, black and Latina female victims.

¹⁷ To clarify, if there was more than one story about a particular victim in the dataset, then "repeated coverage" was coded "1" (yes). If there was only one story about a given victim, then the variable was coded "0" (no, not a repeated story).

Specifically,

H5: Stories about black and Latina female victims would be more likely to contain unsympathetic themes than stories about white female victims (i.e., stories about black and Latina victims will be more likely to include the “bad person,” “risk-taking,” “unsafe environment,” and “expected victimization” themes).

Alternatively, stories about white female victims would be more likely to contain sympathetic themes than stories about black and Latina female victims (i.e., stories about white female victims will be more likely to include the “good person,” “innocent,” “media attention mentioned,” “attacked by a predator stranger,” “safe neighborhood,” “female in peril far from home,” “random victimization,” “strong interpersonal relationships,” and “detailed account of the victimization” themes.)

Finally, regarding the overall story narrative (OSN), I hypothesized:

H6: Stories about black or Latina female victims would be more likely to generate overall unsympathetic story narratives than stories about white female victims.

Alternatively, stories about white female victims would be more likely to result in overall sympathetic narratives than stories about black or Latina female victims.

I tested Hypotheses 1 through 5 at the bivariate level with chi-square analyses and Fisher’s Exact tests. I tested Hypothesis 6 at the multivariate level by estimating multinomial logistic regression equations. For all analyses, I considered the results to be statistically significant if $p \leq .05$. In the next chapter, I provide my statistical findings coupled with excerpts from news stories to add context and meaning to my findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Based on my review of the pertinent literature and critical race feminist thought, I expected to find that thematic story elements and overall story narratives would be more sympathetic for white female victims than the thematic elements and overall story narratives for black and Latina female victims. I also predicted that stories about white female victims would receive more coverage, be more inclined to be national or international in scope, and to contain more photographs.

The first five hypotheses were examined at the bivariate level, and the findings are presented in both text and table format. To elaborate, I examined the likelihood that stories about white, black, and Latina female victims would contain four non-narrative elements, four unsympathetic narrative elements, and ten sympathetic narrative elements. Table 4.1 portrays the bivariate analyses that examine 1) stories about white female victims versus black female victims, 2) stories about white female victims versus Latina female victims, and 3) stories about black female victims versus Latina female victims. Throughout my write-up of the bivariate findings, I include story excerpts to provide contextual examples. These excerpts serve as the qualitative component of my work.

Hypothesis 6 was examined at the multivariate level using multinomial logistic regression, and I provide the findings from these analyses in narrative and tabular format. The findings portrayed in this chapter explain the ways in which news stories about white female victims differed from stories about black and Latina female victims. Put another way, my dissertation findings illuminate how a female victim's race/ethnicity may influence news coverage of her victimization.

Bivariate Analyses

Table 4.1 below provides the bivariate findings between a female victim's race/ethnicity and the dependent variables of interest. Consistent with my first hypothesis, white female victims were the focus of more front-page stories (125 stories) than black female victims (77 stories) and Latina female victims (64 stories).

Table 4.1. Victim Race/Ethnicity by Dependent Variables (Chi-square and Fisher's Exact Test Analyses)

Dependent Variables	White % (n = 125)	Black % (n = 77)	Latina % (n = 64)
<i>Non-Narrative Elements</i>			
Repeated Stories	56.0	57.1	46.9
National/International Coverage $\forall\infty$	57.6	35.1	25.0
Any Front Photograph	67.2	64.9	54.7
Front Photo of Victim	40.8	37.7	28.1
<i>Unsympathetic Narrative Elements</i>			
Bad Person $\forall\$\$	2.4	23.4	7.8
Risk-Taking	21.6	33.8	25.0
Unsafe Environment $\forall\$\$	34.4	62.3	40.6
Expected Victimization	13.6	23.4	18.8
<i>Sympathetic Narrative Elements</i>			
Good Person	19.2	31.2	23.4
Innocent	29.6	35.1	21.9
Media Attention Mentioned $\forall\infty$	46.4	27.3	14.1
Preyed Upon by Stranger $\forall\$\$	24.0	2.6	32.8
Safe Environment $\forall\infty$	16.0	1.3	1.6
Religiosity ∞	12.0	5.2	1.6
Female in Peril Far from Home $\forall\infty$	17.6	1.3	4.7
Random Nature of Victimization \forall	16.0	2.6	7.8
Strong Interpersonal Relationships	24.8	35.1	23.4
Detailed Account of Victimization	35.2	29.9	25.0

\forall = $p \leq .05$ for the comparison between white females and black females

∞ = $p \leq .05$ for the comparison between white females and Latina females

$\$\$ = $p \leq .05$ for the comparison between black females and Latina females

Hypotheses two through four pertained to differences in coverage intensity and use of photographs for stories about white, black and Latina female victims. As shown in Table 4.1, coverage intensity was examined in two ways—as repeated coverage and as national/international coverage. I predicted there would be more repeated stories about white female victims than stories about black and Latina female victims (Hypothesis 2).

However, as shown by Table 4.1, results gleaned from chi-square analyses indicated that differences in repeated coverage between the three groups were not statistically meaningful.¹⁸ Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

I also predicted there would be more national/international stories about white female victims than stories about black and Latina female victims (H3). Table 4.1 shows that stories about white female victims were significantly more likely to be national/international in scope versus stories about either black or Latina female victims.¹⁹ To elaborate, 57.6 percent of the stories about white female victims, 35.1 percent of the stories about black female victims, and 25 percent of the stories about Latina female victims were national or international in scope. This finding points to the newsworthiness of victimization for white females. Simply stated, the victimization of white females is viewed as worthy of attention on the national or international level, but the same cannot be said about the victimization of minority women.²⁰

I also examined front-page photographs because research indicates readers remember story photographs longer than they remember story text (Graber, 1990). Moreover, readers often enter a story through the dominant photograph (The Poynter Institute, 1991). As such, I tallied the number of stories with any front-page photograph (i.e., regardless of what the photograph depicted) as well as the number of stories with a front-page photograph of the victim. In Chapter 3, I hypothesized that stories about white

¹⁸ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = .025$, $p = .874$, $\Phi = .011$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.415$, $p = .234$, $\Phi = -.087$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.478$, $p = .224$, $\Phi = -.102$.

¹⁹ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 9.683$, $p = .002$, $\Phi = -.219$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 18.079$, $p = .000$, $\Phi = -.309$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.670$, $p = .196$, $\Phi = -.109$.

²⁰ Stories about the victimizations of JonBenet Ramsey, Jill Carroll, and the Amish school girls were all coded as national/international stories because they did not take place within the 7 cities represented in this dataset.

female victims would be more likely to contain a front-page photograph (in general and of the victim in particular) than stories about black and Latina female victims (Hypothesis 4). I did not find support for this hypothesis. To be more specific, while Table 4.1 shows a slightly higher percentage of the stories about white female victims contained some type of front-page photograph (67.2%) compared to stories about black (64.9%) and Latina (54.7%) female victims, the differences between the groups were not statistically significant.²¹ Table 4.1 also shows that while a higher percentage of stories about white female victims contained a front-page photograph of the victim (40.8%) than stories about black (37.7%) or Latina (28.1%) female victims, the differences between the groups were not statistically meaningful.²²

I further predicted stories about black and Latina female victims would be more likely to contain unsympathetic narrative elements than stories about white female victims (Hypothesis 5). To be more specific, I examined whether the victim was described as a bad person, a risk-taker, and/or as living in an unsafe environment. I also examined whether the story portrayed the victimization as something that could have been anticipated. The “expected occurrence” theme emerged during the coding process for this dissertation.

I discovered statistically significant differences in the “bad person” and “unsafe environment” themes; the other two unsympathetic themes (“risk-taking” and “expected

²¹ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = .109$, $p = .741$, $\Phi = -.023$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 2.842$, $p = .092$, $\Phi = -.123$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.533$, $p = .216$, $\Phi = -.104$.

²² For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = .196$, $p = .658$, $\Phi = -.031$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 2.934$, $p = .087$, $\Phi = -.125$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.431$, $p = .232$, $\Phi = -.101$.

victimization”) did not statistically differ across racial groups.²³ As summarized in Table 4.1, when compared to both white (2.4%) and Latina (7.8%) female victims, black female victims (23.4%) were significantly more likely to be described as bad people.²⁴ Put another way, stories about black female victims were significantly more likely to portray the victims as bad wives, bad mothers, criminals, sexually promiscuous, and/or as working in deviant professions. To provide an example, in a *Washington Post* story about the Duke Lacrosse rape case, the reader learned the black victim was an “exotic dancer” and that “DNA from multiple men—none a match to the defendants—was found [from] vaginal and rectal swabs” taken from the victim (Whoriskey & Adcock, 2006, p. A10). Such an account highlighted the alleged victim’s deviant lifestyle and worked to delegitimize what happened to her. Although this story was written *after* rape charges against three of the six accused rapists were dropped, stories written long *before* the charges were dropped included similar narratives. Indeed, in a story from *The New York Times*, the same victim was described as a “stripper” and “escort” who wore “see-through” clothing and “passed out drunk” (Wilson & Glater, 2006, p. A15). Both stories point to her sexual and moral deviance; she is a “bad” person.

To provide another example, in a *Chicago Tribune* story about a black murder victim, Jimella Tunstall was described as a single mother who “had trouble with money and past boyfriends and once lost custody of her children” (Rozas, 2006, p. 22). She was also described as a teen mother who occasionally “[fell] prey to [her] own demons”

²³ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 3.644$, $p = .056$, $\Phi = .134$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = .278$, $p = .598$, $\Phi = .038$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.284$, $p = .257$, $\Phi = -.095$.

²⁴ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 22.507$, $p = .000$, $\Phi = .334$. For the comparison between black females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 6.202$, $p = .013$, $\Phi = -.210$. For the comparison between white and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 3.056$, $p = .080$, $\Phi = .127$.

(Rozas, 2006, p. 22). This story portrays Tunstall as an irresponsible mother with an unstable life. In a different story from the *Los Angeles Times* about a black assault victim, Debra Johnson was described as “addicted to crack cocaine,” having a “record of petty, narcotic related crimes,” and unable to hold a job (Leovy, 2006, p. A1). She was also described as “on parole,” and her family stated she disappeared for long periods of time (Leovy, 2006, p. A24). Put simply, Johnson was a known criminal who struggled to maintain a prosocial lifestyle.

Stories about black female victims (62.3%) were significantly more likely to describe the victim’s environment as unsafe compared to stories about both white female victims (34.4%) and Latina (40.6%) victims.²⁵ As previously stated, the “unsafe environment” theme was coded if the victim’s turbulent family environment or dangerous neighborhood was described.

In a story from the *Miami Herald*, the physical assault of a one-year-old black girl named Ashari Simon was described. While it was not clear who the offender was, frequent police visits to the residence were described, and a nameless neighbor stated, “‘Somebody would have thought they would have arrested someone by now... something bad was bound to happen’” (Teproff, 2006, p. 3B). Overall, Simon’s home environment was unsafe, and her victimization did not come as a surprise to her neighbor.

In a different story from the *Miami Herald* about a black female victim, Kennetha Jordan was described as the “latest [murder victim] in a string of Miami area teenage gunshot victims,” and her shooting occurred “in a notoriously dangerous area of Opa-

²⁵ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 15.023$, $p = .000$, $\Phi = .273$. For the comparison between black females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 6.607$, $p = .010$, $\Phi = -.216$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = .708$, $p = .400$, $\Phi = .061$.

Locka” (Pinzur & Lebowitz, 2006, p. 1A). And, within the news account, one of Jordan’s friends stated, “‘We’re tired’ of the shootings” (Pinzur & Lebowitz, 2006, p. 24A). In short, Jordan lived within an environment where shootings are a common occurrence.

Such a narrative also emerged in a *Washington Post* story about the shooting death of another teenage black female named Cindy “Lil’ Cindy” Gray, where the reporter described the crime-ridden and graffiti-covered housing complex in which the shooting occurred. This graffiti, “profane or benign, symbolized the neglect and disorder” that Big Cindy and her neighbors faced daily (Pierre, 2006, p. A1). In addition, the reporter acknowledged that it was difficult to find anyone in the neighborhood who was “untouched by homicide,” and neighbors wanted to “curb the senseless violence” (Pierre, 2006, p. A1). In fact, violence occurred so frequently in this housing complex that the D.C. Housing Authority considered demolishing it (Pierre, 2006). Clearly, Lil’ Cindy lived in an unsafe neighborhood where her death did not come as a surprise. I argue the “unsafe environment” theme underscores negative beliefs about life within black families and black neighborhoods, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5.

As stated in the second part of Hypothesis 5, I predicted stories about white female victims would be more likely to contain sympathetic narrative elements than stories about black and Latina female victims. For this dissertation, I examined 10 sympathetic themes. Specifically, based on prior research, I searched for the “good person,” “innocent,” “media attention mentioned,” “preyed upon by a stranger,” and “safe environment” themes within the stories I read. In addition, several new themes emerged during the data coding process for this dissertation, including the themes of “religiosity,” “female in peril far from home,” “random nature of the victimization,”

“strong interpersonal relationships,” and the “detailed account of the victimization” theme.

Statistically significant differences were found in the “media attention mentioned,” “preyed upon by a predator stranger,” “safe environment,” “religiosity,” “female in peril far from home,” and “random nation of the victimization” themes. The other analyzed sympathetic themes (i.e., the “good person,” “innocent,” “strong interpersonal relationships,” and “detailed account of the victimization” themes) did not differ statistically across groups.²⁶

The theme of “media attention mentioned” was coded if the presence of reporters, various media outlets, and/or descriptions of widespread news coverage were cited in the story. Stories about white female victims were significantly more likely than stories about black and Latina female victims to describe attributed media attention.²⁷ Specifically, as noted in Table 4.1, about 46 percent of the stories about white female victims, 27 percent of stories about black female victims, and 14 percent of stories about Latina female victims contained this theme. To provide an example, in a story from the *Houston Chronicle* about John Mark Karr’s confession to the killing of 6-year-old beauty queen

²⁶ “*Good Person*” theme: For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 3.768$, $p = .052$, $\Phi = .137$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = .464$, $p = .496$, $\Phi = .050$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.044$, $p = .307$, $\Phi = -.086$.

“*Innocent*” theme: For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = .657$, $p = .417$, $\Phi = .057$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.282$, $p = .258$, $\Phi = -.082$.

For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 2.948$, $p = .086$, $\Phi = -.145$. “*Strong Interpersonal Relationships*” theme: For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 2.453$, $p = .117$, $\Phi = .110$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = .043$, $p = .836$, $\Phi = -.015$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 2.259$, $p = .133$, $\Phi = -.127$.

“*Detailed Account of the Victimization*” theme: For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = .611$, $p = .435$, $\Phi = -.055$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 2.032$, $p = .154$, $\Phi = -.104$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = .414$, $p = .520$, $\Phi = -.054$.

²⁷ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 7.320$, $p = .007$, $\Phi = -.190$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 19.343$, $p = .000$, $\Phi = -.320$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 3.641$, $p = .056$, $\Phi = -.161$.

JonBenet Ramsey, the image of JonBenet in pageant gear was described as “haunting TV talk shows ever since [her death]” (Tsai, 2006, p. A6). Moreover, the case was described as “one of the most sensational unsolved murder cases in the nation,” and JonBenet’s family was described as living under constant media scrutiny (Tsai, 2006, p. A6). Specifically, news outlets casted suspicion on JonBenet’s parents and older brother, causing family members to “vigorously defend [themselves]” and “chastis[e] the media” (Tsai, 2006, p. A6). The media’s fascination with this case was obvious.

Extensive media attention was also given to Jill Carroll, a white journalist who was kidnapped in Iraq. From a *Los Angeles Times* story, the reader learned that Carroll “was shocked by the heavy news coverage of her kidnapping and the publicity surrounding her case” (Daragahi, 2006, p. A22). Indeed, all the propaganda videos her captors forced her to create had been disseminated worldwide (Daragahi, 2006). Moreover, the article stated President Bush was thrilled by her safe return (Daragahi, 2006). In short, Carroll’s kidnapping was an important international matter worthy of media attention.

To provide a third example, in a *Miami Herald* story about the murder of a white 11-year-old girl named Carlie Brucia, the manhunt for Brucia’s killer was described. As noted in the story, “the first time the world saw Joseph Smith” (via television news), he was luring Carlie to her death (Long, 2006, p. 2B). The images of her kidnapping, caught on security camera footage at a car wash and publicized widely, “were beamed around the world” (Long, 2006, p. 2B). The reporter for the story argued the chilling video broadcast “will, no doubt, be forever etched in viewers’ minds” (Long, 2006, p. 2B). Due to the widespread media dissemination of the security camera footage, countless citizens

called in tips to the Miami Police Department hotline (Long, 2006). Put simply, Brucia's victimization warranted worldwide attention, and the images of her kidnapping will forever impact viewers.

Stories about white female victims were significantly more likely than stories about black female victims to describe the victim as attacked by a predator stranger.²⁸ In addition, relative to stories about black female victims, stories about Latina female victims were significantly more likely to describe the victim as preyed upon by a stranger.²⁹ As noted in Table 4.1, about 33 percent of the stories about Latina female victims, 24 percent of the stories about white female victims, and three percent of the stories about black female victims described the victim as attacked by a predator stranger.³⁰

For example, the “attacked by a predator stranger theme” appeared in an *Arizona Republic* story about a Latina murder victim named Carmen Miranda. She was the victim of a serial killer and rapist known as the Baseline Killer (Kiefer, 2006). The story described her killer as “strik[ing] in a flash” (Kiefer, 2006, p. B1). He attacked Miranda “from behind” while she washed her car at a self-service car wash (Kiefer, 2006, p. B1-B2). In the article, a police officer called the attack “a blitz”— “It’s quick. It appears very calculated. It takes place in a matter of seconds” (Kiefer, 2006, p. B2). The reporter

²⁸ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 16.371$, $p = .000$, $\Phi = -.285$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 1.668$, $p = .196$, $\Phi = .094$.

²⁹ For the comparison between black females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 23.374$, $p = .000$, $\Phi = .407$.

³⁰ In the *Arizona Republic*, there were 17 stories about two serial killing sprees. In stories about both sprees, Latina females were often the “primary” (i.e., coded) victim. Due to the Baseline Killer and Serial Shooter cases, many Latina females were described as attacked by predator strangers. These two killing sprees skewed the findings for this theme regarding Latina female victims. Indeed, when running bivariate analyses without these 17 stories, stories about white female victims are significantly more likely to contain this theme than stories about Latina female victims. With that said, I made the decision not to remove any stories from my dataset to give an accurate representation of the year’s news. Moreover, the 17 stories featured many different Latina female victims, so it did not make sense to remove the stories.

also noted “the attacker has preyed mostly on women” (Kiefer, 2006, p. B1). Miranda was the victim of a predator lying in wait for her, which meant she could not have protected herself from this calculated killer.

In another story from *The Arizona Republic*, the murder of a Mexican immigrant was described. Claudia Gutierrez-Cruz was shot by a pair of serial killers known as the Serial Shooters, who “picked victims who were outside alone at night and looked like transients” (Villa & Kiefer, 2006, p. A17). In fact, the killers described their seven killings as “random recreational violence” (Villa & Kiefer, 2006, p. A17). Gutierrez-Cruz was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and her murderers preyed upon her while she was walking alone at night.

The “attacked by a predator stranger” theme was also present in the story about Kristin Smart, a white female college student. In a *Los Angeles Times* article, Kristin’s alleged killer, Paul Flores, was described as creepy and a nuisance to women. In fact, Flores came to be known as “Chester the Molester” by several women, and he was reported to have climbed onto a woman’s balcony without her consent (King, 2006, A20). He frequented parties—often uninvited—looking to find sexual partners (King, 2006). According to accounts, Flores attacked Kristin after escorting her home. The pair did not know one another, and Kristin was described as extremely intoxicated (King, 2006). In short, Flores was a sexual predator and an inebriated Kristin was his unfortunate prey.

A different white female victim, who was also attacked by a predator stranger, appeared in a *New York Times* story. In the story, Jennifer Moore called her boyfriend at 4 a.m. and told him she was being followed. The reporter also indicated that Jennifer was

possibly drugged (Baker, 2006, p. A1). At some point, Jennifer ended up in the cab of the person following her—a “drifter and career criminal” named Draymond Coleman (Baker, 2006, p. B5). Coleman, a recently released prisoner with an extensive criminal record, murdered Jennifer and dumped her body. It appears Coleman saw an opportunity to attack a vulnerable woman walking alone at night and took it.

I also examined the “safe environment” theme, which served as a counterpoint to the “unsafe environment” theme. The “safe environment” theme was coded if the victim’s environment was described as a peaceful, relatively crime-free environment. Stories about white female victims (16%) were significantly more likely to contain the “safe environment” theme than stories about black female victims (1.3%) and Latina female victims (1.6%).³¹ Indeed, this theme appeared in only one story about a black female victim and in one story about a Latina female victim.

The “safe environment” theme appeared in an *Arizona Republic* story about the murder of two white females within their home. At a community meeting in the aftermath of the crime, police personnel assured residents by stating, “Your neighborhood is very safe.” (Walsh & Scarborough, 2006, p. B2). Police also commented on the low number of police calls they received from the area within the past year (Walsh & Scarborough, 2006). At the community meeting, residents called the neighborhood “a safe place to live” and dismissed the idea of moving to another neighborhood or changing their daily routines to avoid danger (Walsh & Scarborough, 2006, p. B2).

³¹ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 11.055$, $p = .001$, $\Phi = -.234$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 8.933$, $p = .003$, $\Phi = -.217$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: Fisher’s Exact Test – $p = 1.000$.

A similar narrative appeared in a *Houston Chronicle* article about the murder of a white college student named Rachel Pendray at the hands of a male friend. Her death was described as an anomaly (Rice, 2006). Other students at Sam Houston State were shocked, and one student told reporters, “Nothing like this usually happens in Huntsville” (Rice, 2006, p. A10).

To provide a third example, in a *Chicago Tribune* story about the mass shooting of several Amish girls in their schoolhouse, the Amish community was described as a safe and “secluded” place (Anderson, 2006, p. 1). The attack “was especially shocking and foreign for the Amish, whose strict religious beliefs reject violence” (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). Witnesses commented on the shock the victims must have felt; people “doubted whether the children at the school would have even seen a gun not used for hunting” (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). Put simply, this random act of violence was unimaginable in the safe Amish community.

The new sympathetic theme of “religiosity” emerged during the data collection process for this dissertation. The theme of “religiosity” was coded if the victim’s belief/participation in a specific religion, her belief in God, or her attendance at church was discussed in the story narrative. The theme of religiosity appeared in 12 percent of the stories about white female victims, 5.2 percent of the stories about black victims, and 1.6 percent of the stories about Latina victims. Indeed, white female victims were significantly more likely to be described as religious compared to their Latina counterparts.³²

³² For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 5.951$, $p = .015$, $\Phi = -.177$. For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 2.590$, $p = .108$, $\Phi = -.113$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: Fisher’s Exact Test – $p = .377$.

All three of the following story examples featured white victims with strong beliefs in God and a steadfast devotion to their respective religions. For example, in the aforementioned *Chicago Tribune* story about the murder of the Amish schoolgirls, details about the Amish community's religious beliefs were described (Anderson, 2006). Indeed, the shooting "forced a religious community that [was] fiercely protective of its Old World ways" into the national spotlight (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). Moreover, many of the Amish were uncomfortable with the presence of police and media because "the Amish [shun] the use of mechanized devices" and mainly speak an old German dialect, not English (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). The news story also described the Amish community's views on burials. The Amish "worship and dispatch the dead to God's care from their homes and barns" (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). As such, the girls killed would have had funerals that aligned with their strong religious beliefs (Anderson, 2006).

The religious nature of a white female victim was also described in a story from *The Washington Post*. The story—which described the shooting death of a female police officer killed in the line of duty—contained a description of a video played during her funeral. In the video, the victim, Vicky Armel, stated, "If you told me last year I'd be standing in front of hundreds of people talking about Jesus Christ, I'd say, 'You're crazy'" (Duggan & Jackman, 2006, p. A12). But, as declared, she "found God" (Duggan & Jackman, 2006, p. A12). Interestingly, Armel did not grow up in a religious family, but she had found peace within her church community as an adult (Duggan & Jackman, 2006).

To provide another example, an article from the *Chicago Tribune* about a white murdered nun described her deep religious commitment. In the story, Sister Karen

Klimczak was depicted as a “gift from God” from “a deeply religious home” (Huppke, 2006, p. 1). She was a former Catholic school teacher and a recent “pastoral associate” (Huppke, 2006, p. 16). She founded a religious-based halfway house for criminal offenders transitioning out of prison (Huppke, 2006). In the hours before her death, Sister Karen attended church services. Sadly, friends of Sister Karen did not realize she was missing for several hours because they assumed she was attending Easter services around the city (Huppke, 2006).

The sympathetic theme of “female in peril far from home” also emerged during the coding process for my dissertation. Stories that contained this theme described the victim as far from home without any protection (and in dire need of it). Approximately 18 percent of the stories about white female victims contained this theme, compared to less than two percent of the stories about black female victim and less than 5 percent of the stories about Latina female victims. Indeed, white female victims were significantly more likely to be described as females in peril far from home than their black and Latina counterparts.³³ In most—but not all—cases, this theme appeared in stories about females victimized in Iraq.

For example, in a *New York Times* article about the murder of a white human rights worker in Iraq named Fern Holland, police officers believed a group of Iraqi men dressed in police uniforms killed her on a desolate road (Glanz, 2006, p. A12). Her Iraqi translator was also killed. Holland was unable to protect herself; she was in a secluded

³³ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 12.549$, $p = .000$, $\Phi = -.249$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 6.149$, $p = .013$, $\Phi = -.180$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: Fisher’s Exact Test – $p = .329$.

location, did not speak the language of the Iraqi people, and she was victimized by people posing as helpers.

In another story, Jill Carroll (a white reporter) was kidnapped in Iraq after her car was ambushed (Semple & Filkens, 2006, p. A1). Per the *New York Times* article, Jill Carroll's Iraqi translator was killed in the ambush, while her driver managed to get away (Semple & Filkens, 2006). Jill ran from the scene, but her kidnappers managed to capture her. Put simply, Jill was not safe in Iraq—a place in which “dozens of people are kidnapped... every day” (Semple & Filkens, 2006, p. A8).

In a *Washington Post* story about a female soldier sexually assaulted by her Sergeant, the timing of her assaults was described. The attacks happened “after her unit moved to Iraq,” but never happened during her training in the United States. A female friend supported her claims: “I have no doubt it happened to her” (St. George, 2006, p. A6). Due to her trauma, the soldier returned home to her mother's care and refused to deploy to Iraq again, going AWOL (St. George, 2006). In Iraq, the victimized soldier was extremely vulnerable—far from home and defenseless.

This theme also appeared in a *Chicago Tribune* story about Christina Eilman, a white female rape victim. In the *Tribune* story, Christina was described as a bipolar Californian stranded in Chicago (Heinzmann, 2006, p. 1). As she was arrested for causing a scene at a Chicago airport, she begged Chicago police officers for help (Heinzmann, 2006). Instead, they took her to jail where other inmates reported she had a mental breakdown (Heinzmann, 2006). Later that evening, instead of holding Christina for her own protection, jail personnel released her “into one of Chicago's highest-crime neighborhoods” (Heinzmann, 2006, p. 1). Shortly thereafter, Christina was raped and fell

(or was thrown) from a seventh-floor window. She was taken to the hospital and only then were her parents notified. Near her hospital bedside, Christina's parents stated they believed the actions taken by law enforcement officials "led a vulnerable woman to disaster" (Heinzmann, 2006, p. 1). As she was thousands of miles away from her concerned parents when the mental breakdown occurred, Christina was not capable of protecting herself.

During this dissertation, the new "random nature of the victimization" theme also emerged. This theme served as a counterpoint to the "expected nature of the victimization" theme. A story was coded as having this theme if the victim—and community—could not have anticipated the attack. Sixteen percent of the stories about white female victims, 2.6 percent of the stories about black female victims, and 7.8 percent of the stories about Latina victims contained this theme. Stories about white female victims were significantly more likely than stories about black female victims to contain the "random nature of the victimization" theme.³⁴

For example, the murders of a white girl named Jennifer Ertman and a Latina girl named Elizabeth Pena were described in a story from the *Houston Chronicle*. (Jennifer, the white victim, was the primary focus of the story.) At around midnight, Jennifer and Elizabeth took a well-known shortcut home to make Jennifer's curfew (Ruiz & Turner, 2006, p. A1). Along the way, they happened upon a group of six males participating in a gang initiation. This group decided—on a whim—to rape and murder the two girls (Ruiz & Turner, 2006, p. A1). The brutal gang rape and murders—and the horrendous details of

³⁴ For the comparison between white females and black females: $X^2(1) = 8.819$, $p = .003$, $\Phi = -.209$. For the comparison between white females and Latina females: $X^2(1) = 2.472$, $p = .116$, $\Phi = -.114$. For the comparison between black and Latina females: Fisher's Exact Test – $p = .245$.

the victims' deaths— “horrif[ied] a city” (Ruiz & Turner, 2006, p. A1). These murders were random and shocking—the girls were trying their best to get home in time for curfew, but instead walked into a death trap. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

A *Miami Herald* story about the cold-case murder of a white six-year-old girl named Judith Ann Roberts provided another example where the random nature of a crime was described. Judith, who lived in Baltimore but was visiting her grandparents in Miami, was kidnapped from her grandparents' home. A detective assigned to the case believed the primary suspect in the case—a then-16-year-old boy—killed her because he “saw the little girl through [a] window and [decided] he had to have her” (Yanez, 2006, p. 24A). This crime was completely random; Judith was allegedly kidnapped and killed by a passerby who acted on a murderous impulse.

A *Chicago Tribune* story about the assault of June Siler at a city busy stop also contained the “random victimization” theme. June, a hospital nurse, was standing at a bus stop outside her workplace when a man she made small talk with slashed her throat “without warning” (Possley, 2006, p. 1). In a state of shock, June did not realize she was badly bleeding until she heard what sounded like raindrops on the ground (Possley, 2006). There was no way for June to have anticipated such an attack—she rode the city bus every day after work, and she had never felt unsafe before (Possley, 2006).

Multivariate Analyses

As discussed above, bivariate analyses were used to examine Hypotheses 1 through 5. These analyses portrayed several significant differences in the inclusion of sympathetic and unsympathetic themes across stories for white, black, and Latina female

victims. Hypothesis 6 predicted that overall victim story narratives would differ by the race/ethnicity of the female victim, and the hypothesis was examined at the multivariate level. Put another way, I examined whether differences existed at the multivariate level by examining the effect of race/ethnicity on the 3-category OSN variable, while controlling for the effects of many covariates.

As a first step, I estimated baseline multinomial logistic regression equations using race/ethnicity (as a series of dummies) to predict OSN. In the baseline models presented in Table 4.2, it is clear there were significant differences across race/ethnicity in the likelihood that a story would result in an overall sympathetic (versus unsympathetic) narrative and in neutral (versus unsympathetic) narratives.

Table 4.2. The Effect of a Female Victim’s Race/Ethnicity on OSN—Baseline Multinomial Logistic Regression Models (N = 266)

Variable	Sympathetic (vs. Unsympathetic)			Neutral (vs. Unsympathetic)			Neutral (vs. Sympathetic)		
	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)
Race/Ethnicity (White = Ref)									
Black	-1.269**	.476	.281	-.996*	.478	.369	.272	.315	.388
Latina	-1.364**	.517	.256	-.655	.502	.519	.708*	.339	2.031
Race/Ethnicity (Black = Ref)									
White	1.269**	.476	3.556	.996*	.478	2.708	-.272	.315	.762
Latina	-.095	.491	.909	.341	.468	1.406	.436	.381	1.547
Intercept (White = Ref)	1.962***	.356		1.754***	.361		-.208	.187	
Intercept (Black = Ref)	.693*	.316		.758*	.313		.065	.254	

Notes: The coefficients for the independent variables that exerted a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable are given in boldface. Likelihood ratio chi-square improvement/ $df = 26.537/4^*$; Cox and snell $R^2 .045$; Nagelkerke $R^2 .052$; * $p < .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

In the baseline models (Table 4.2) above, stories about black and Latina female victims were significantly less likely to result in sympathetic victim narratives overall (versus unsympathetic narratives) than stories about white female victims. Put another way, stories about white female victims were significantly more likely to result in sympathetic overall narratives (versus unsympathetic overall narratives). To more closely examine the robustness of the findings from the baseline models, a series of fully specified multinomial logistic regression equations with covariates were estimated.³⁵ The results of the fully specified multinomial regression models are presented in Table 4.3 and align with the results from the baseline models. Put another way, the fully specified models (presented in Table 4.3 below) preserved the expected structure of the associations, and the associations were more clearly outlined.

³⁵ Before the multivariate analyses were conducted, I created correlation matrices to verify that my variables were not highly correlated with one another. These matrices can be found in Appendix 2. The results of the bivariate correlations were used to select the most rigorous, yet parsimonious, list of covariates for inclusion in the fully specified models. In addition, these results provided preliminary information regarding issues surrounding multicollinearity.

Table 4.3. The Effect of a Female Victim's Race/Ethnicity on OSN—Fully Specified Multinomial Logistic Regression Models (N = 266)

Variable	Sympathetic (vs. Unsympathetic)			Neutral (vs. Unsympathetic)			Neutral (vs. Sympathetic)		
	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)
Race/Ethnicity (White = Ref)									
Black	-1.520**	.578	.219	-.862	.564	.423	.659	.368	1.933
Latina	-1.564*	.643	.209	-.655	.616	.519	.909*	.395	2.482
Race/Ethnicity (Black = Ref)									
White	1.520**	.578	4.574	.862	.564	2.367	-.659	.368	.517
Latina	-.044	.658	.957	.206	.629	1.229	.250	.423	1.284
Minor Victim	1.655**	.595	5.232	1.392*	.589	4.024	-.263	.309	.769
Young Adult Off	.019	.549	1.019	.016	.526	1.016	-.003	.339	.997
White Offender	-1.478*	.580	.228	-.866	.552	.421	.612	.373	1.844
Male Offender	-.279	.555	.756	-.301	.547	.740	-.022	.320	.978
Interracial Crime	.013	.612	1.013	-.016	.582	.984	-.029	.405	.971
Stranger Offender	.681	.569	1.975	.163	.550	1.176	-.518	.352	.596
Murder	.407	.558	1.503	-.190	.539	.827	-.597	.334	.550
Vic. At/Near Home	.608	.554	1.836	.438	.543	1.550	-.169	.308	.844
One Victim	-.216	.485	.806	-.679	.472	.507	-.463	.293	.629
One Offender	.710	.524	2.034	1.002*	.509	2.724	.292	.316	1.339
Liberal Paper	1.063*	.502	2.896	.489	.494	1.630	-.575*	.284	.563
Intercept (White = Ref)	.856	.671		1.485*	.648		.601	.431	
Intercept (Black = Ref)	-.664	.794		.596	.754		1.260*	.506	

Notes: The coefficients for the independent variables that exerted a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable are given in boldface. Likelihood ratio chi-square improvement/ $df = 59.613/26^{***}$; Cox and snell $R^2 .201$; Nagelkerke $R^2 .233$; * $p < .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Table 4.3 above presents the results of the fully specified models for my multivariate examination of the effect of a female victim's race/ethnicity on a story's overall narrative about her victimization. In the table, I presented the logit coefficients, affiliated standard errors, levels of statistical significance, and odds ratios. The coefficients for the independent variables that exerted statistically significant effects on the OSN variable are given in bold (and with asterisks) to facilitate discussion. Based on provided fit statistics, I concluded the models were a good fit to the data.

Table 4.3 shows that five variables significantly predicted a story's overall narrative: the race/ethnicity of the victim, the age of the victim, the race of the offender, the number of noted offenders, and whether the newspaper was published in a liberal-leaning city. Stories about white female victims, all else considered, were more likely than stories about black and Latina female victims to result in overall narratives that were sympathetic of the victim, which supports Hypothesis 6. Put another way, the stories about black and Latina female victims were more likely to result in unsympathetic overall narratives than in sympathetic overall narratives. To be more specific, relative to stories about white female victims, the results presented in Table 4.3 showed that the odds of story having an overall sympathetic narrative (versus an overall unsympathetic narrative) were 78.1% lower when the victim was a black female and 79.1% lower when the victim was a Latina female. To state this a different way, and as depicted within Table 4.3, the probability of a story resulting in an overall sympathetic narrative for the victim (versus one that was unsympathetic overall) was about 4.6 times

higher if the story was about a white female victim than a black female victim. The results presented in Table 4.3 also showed that stories about Latina female victims were 2.5 times more likely to result in an overall neutral victim narrative (versus an overall sympathetic narrative) than stories about white female victims. There were no differences in the resulting overall story narratives for stories about black versus Latina female victims. In short, the difference in overall narrative content was reserved to differences between white and minority women. Relative to stories about white female victims, stories about black female victims were more likely to be unsympathetic versus sympathetic overall. And, relative to their white female counterparts, stories about Latina female victims were more likely to be both unsympathetic and neutral (rather than sympathetic) overall.

Other variables also affected whether the overall narrative was sympathetic to the victim (versus unsympathetic overall). Stories about female victims aged 17 years old or younger were 5.2 times more likely to have narratives that were sympathetic overall (versus unsympathetic overall) than stories about adult female victims. In addition, stories about young victims were four times more likely to result in an overall neutral victim narrative than in a narrative rated as unsympathetic overall. In short, overall narratives were more likely to be unsympathetic of the victim (vs. sympathetic or neutral) when the victim was an adult versus a minor.

Overall story narratives were also affected by the race of the offender. Stories with white offenders were 77.2% less likely to produce overall narratives that were sympathetic (versus unsympathetic) of the victim. Put another way,

stories with non-white (i.e., minority) offenders (or offenders in which the race was not known) were more likely to result in sympathetic (versus unsympathetic) overall narratives for victims. This finding aligns with research on white privilege as well as research on the “minority male” offender stereotype. This finding is discussed further in this dissertation’s concluding chapter.

The number of offenders noted within the story also made a difference. Stories where only one offender was mentioned were 2.7 times more likely to generate overall neutral victim narratives (versus overall unsympathetic narratives) than stories where multiple offenders were noted or where the number of offenders was not explicitly stated. Finally, stories reported in newspapers located in politically liberal-leaning cities were almost 3 times more likely to result in overall narratives sympathetic to the victim than stories reported in newspapers located in politically-balanced cities. Moreover, stories disseminated from newspapers located in liberal-leaning cities were 43.7% less likely to produce stories that had overall neutral narratives (versus narratives that were sympathetic to the victim overall).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Victimization rates vary by race and ethnicity among females. Indeed, white females have lower rates of violent victimization than minority females (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2011), and black females are victimized at higher rates than both whites and Latinas (Catalano, 2006). In general, Latina female victims have higher rates of victimization than white females but lower rates of victimization than black females (Catalano, 2006; Rennison, 2002). Despite the differences in victimization rates for black, white, and Latina females, the news media frequently focus on the victimization experiences of white women and children. This phenomenon—often called the “missing white woman syndrome” (Moody et al., 2009) or the “missing pretty girl syndrome” (Stillman, 2007)—inaccurately portrays the reality of victimization for females in the United States. This phenomenon also works to foster the “ideal” victim stereotype.

Perceptions of crime, victims, and offenders materialize, to some degree, due to news media coverage. Indeed, the media constitute the number one source of information for most people about most aspects of their lives (Beale, 2006; Dowler, 2003), and media outlets provide venues through which race and ethnicity are socially construed (Welch, 2007). In this study, I found more front-page stories about white female victims ($n = 125$) than stories about black ($n = 77$) and Latina ($n = 64$) female victims. Given this finding and the concept of media framing, I argue the media frame victimization against white females as a topic worthy of our collective attention. Moreover, the medias’ focus on certain types of victims influences the public’s agenda; undeniably, many pieces of

legislation are named after “ideal” victims (Frank, 2016; Freeman-Longo, 1996). To provide some examples, Megan’s Law was created in the aftermath of the death of Megan Kanka, a young white female murdered by her sex offender neighbor (Frank, 2016; Smith, 2017). Caylee Anthony, a white two-year-old girl, was killed; in the aftermath of the crime, Caylee’s Law was written and passed in ten states (Frank, 2016). This law mandates that parents report their children missing within 24 hours (Frank, 2016). The AMBER Alert system was named after Amber Hagerman, a nine-year-old white girl murdered in Arlington, Texas (Morris, 2004). Moreover, Presidential candidate Donald Trump recently touted “Kate’s Law,” a law written in the aftermath of Kate Steinle’s murder (Frank, 2016). Kate was a white female, and she was murdered by an illegal immigrant (Frank, 2016). Such pieces of legislation often mask the greater risk of victimization minority people face (Freeman-Longo, 1996).

With regard to gatekeeping theory, Shoemaker and Voss (2009) found that decisions about what to publish were influenced by the editors’ perceptions of what they felt readers wanted (see also Maibach & Parrott, 1995). In contrast, Cassidy (2006) found company-wide beliefs were more important in the news-selection process than individual beliefs. Regardless, it appears gatekeepers (i.e., journalists and editors) either believe readers want to hear about white females’ victimizations and/or belong to companies that hold strong beliefs about the newsworthiness of white female victims. Either way, the same message—that white females are vulnerable to unprovoked and unimaginable victimization—is disseminated. Importantly, cultivation theorists argue that repeated messages strengthen consumers’ beliefs and stereotypes about certain topics (Parrott & Parrott, 2015). Moreover, causal attribution theorists argue indirect experiences may both

negatively and positively influence perceptions of the world (Sacco, 1996; Tyler, 1980). Put simply, most Americans do not have direct contact with crime, so they learn about crime vicariously through media representations. As Madriz (1997) argued, due to the overwhelming number of portrayals of white women as victims, the average person believes white women are more likely to be harmed than black or Latina women. The theories discussed here indicate that media portrayals matter in the formation of beliefs about crime. For this reason, the primary goal of this dissertation was to examine whether differential treatment of white, black, and Latina female victims materialized in newspaper stories.

In her work, Gilchrist (2010) noted that “‘good’ women are seen as... worth saving or avenging” (p. 375). If some victims are believed to be worth avenging because of sympathetic media portrayals, then this may affect how police, prosecutors, and jurors respond to criminal events. In fact, there is evidence to indicate that not all victims receive the same degree of justice, and differential media coverage may play a role in the actions ultimately taken within the criminal justice system. Indeed, research shows police work harder to solve a case once it has received media coverage (Lee, 2005), presumably because media attention places pressure on police officers to work to quickly solve a given crime (Bandes, 2004) and avenge the victim. Moreover, Pritchard (1980) found prosecutors were less inclined to offer plea deals to defendants in criminal cases that received media coverage, presumably because the public viewed plea deals as soft punishments (Cohen & Doob, 1989) that did not adequately provide victims their due justice. Regarding criminal sentencing, research showed offenders who raped white women were punished more harshly than those who raped black women (Crenshaw,

1991), and black youth who harmed white victims received longer sentences than white youth who harmed black victims (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014). Furthermore, a criminal court was most likely to impose the death penalty upon a defendant when the victim was a white female (Holcomb et al., 2004; Stauffer et al., 2006).

Feminists argue females are afforded fewer opportunities because they are not male. Critical race feminists go a step further by arguing minority females are afforded fewer opportunities than white females (Smith, 2010). Put another way, white females experience sexism, but minority women face sexism and racism simultaneously (Beal, 1970; Higginbotham, 1983; Potter, 2013). Critical race feminism provided the foundation for my work; I expected non-white females would be portrayed less sympathetically in the news compared to their white counterparts due to longstanding racism and sexism. With regard to differences among minority females, it is important to point out that recent iterations of critical race feminism have progressed, with prominent feminist voices calling for the exploration of multiple minority groups' representation. Put another way, critical race feminists argue the experiences of one minority group differ from the experiences of other minority groups (Ortega, 2016, Potter, 2013). Specifically, critical race scholars argue for the dismantling of the "black/white binary" system and the creation of a system that takes seriously the experience of the "multiple 'other,'" such as Latina women (Ortega, 2016, p. 314; see also Guzman & Valdivia, 2004).

Overall, the work conducted within this dissertation expanded on—and improved upon—prior research in multiple ways. This dissertation was the first to examine Latina victims' portrayals (i.e., as distinct from portrayals of black female victims). Moreover, I examined front-page stories about all types of crimes—not just homicides or sexual

assaults. Furthermore, the expansive dataset created for this work, which was derived from front-page stories from seven different broadsheet newspapers across the United States, allowed me to conduct more advanced statistical analyses. This was the first study in this area to examine the effects of a female victim's race/ethnicity on the type of news coverage she received at the multivariate level. Importantly, this analytic technique allowed me to control for several important covariates when assessing whether overall story narratives differed depending on whether a story was about a white, black, or Latina victim.

At the bivariate level, I did not find statistically significant differences in the likelihood of repeated coverage or in the inclusion of story photographs in the stories about white, black, and Latina victims. However, I did find that the victimization of white females is portrayed as an important issue nation- or world-wide, whereas the victimization of black and Latina females is not. To be clear, stories about white female victims were significantly more likely than stories about both black and Latina female victims to receive national or international coverage.³⁶ I argue stories that reach a national or international level of coverage are more noteworthy than the stories that are published only in the local area (see Jeanis & Powers, 2016; Jewkes & Linnemann, 2018). This finding is very much in line with beliefs surrounding white privilege and minority devaluation; the victimization of minority females is not valued in the same way as the victimization of white females (Ammons, 1995). Indeed, at the March for Our Lives rally against gun violence held in March 2018, an 11-year-old black girl named Naomi Wadler stated, "I am here today to acknowledge and represent the African-American girls whose

³⁶ Slakoff & Brennan (2017) did not find statistically significant differences in national/international coverage for white versus non-white female victims. This dissertation's findings differ.

stories don't make the front page of every national newspaper, whose stories don't lead the evening news" (Andone, 2018, para. 2). At 11-years-old, Naomi is cognizant of the lack of media attention minority female victims receive on the national level. Indeed, agenda-setting theorists argue the media tell consumers what to think about (Gross & Aday, 2003), and the victimization of white females is clearly portrayed as important and worthy of our collective concern.

Regarding the likelihood that an unsympathetic narrative theme would appear in a news story, I found black female victims were significantly more likely to be portrayed as "bad" people compared to white and Latina female victims. This finding is very much in line with research about media-driven racial and ethnic stereotypes and the "ideal" victim stereotype. Researchers note that black females are commonly stereotyped as aggressive (Lobasz, 2008; Young, 1986), sexually promiscuous (Ammons, 1995; Norwood, 2014; Rome, 2004), coming from broken homes (Ammons, 1995), and as "welfare queens" (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997, p. 393). Alternatively, white female victims are portrayed as "ideal" or "worthy" victims (Christie, 1986; Gekoski et al., 2012; Madriz, 1997) with fairy-tale lives (Wanzo, 2008). To further the point, a recent study from Epstein and colleagues (2017) found adults viewed black girls "as less innocent and more adult-like than white girls" (p. 1). Specifically, Epstein and her colleagues (2017) found black girls are perceived as knowing a lot about adult topics, including sex, and as needing less protection, nurturing, and support than white girls. This phenomenon is referred to as the "adultification" of black girls (Epstein et al., 2017), and I argue many of the stereotypes of black girls persist via media coverage of black females, in general, and black victims,

specifically. As shown in the story excerpts in Chapter 4, black female victims are often portrayed as bad mothers, over-sexed, and criminal within newspaper stories.

I also found stories about black female victims were significantly more likely to describe the victims' unsafe environments than stories about white and Latina female victims. I argue narratives about black people who live in unsafe environments feed into negative racial stereotypes. The pervasiveness of negative stereotypes about minority communities is clear when one considers that, in a speech to a black community, then-Presidential candidate Donald Trump stated, "We will make your streets safe so when you walk down the street, you don't get shot, which is happening now. That's what's happening now" (Bump, 2016, para. 3). While research does demonstrate that people living in inner-city environments are at a greater risk of victimization (Lauritsen & Heimer, 2009), I argue the constant mention of "unsafe environments" in stories about black female victims serves to normalize and trivialize inner-city and family-based crime. Put another way, the "unsafe environment" theme makes crime within certain families and communities appear normal and/or impossible to avoid. I argue this theme highlights negative beliefs about life within black families and black neighborhoods.

Regarding sympathetic narrative themes, I found media attention was significantly more likely to be mentioned in stories about white female victims than in stories about black or Latina female victims. Like Slakoff and Brennan (2017), I argued the "media attention mentioned" theme provided another indicator of coverage intensity. Indeed, if newspaper stories describe heavy media coverage, readers are likely to view the victim as important. This finding is in line with notions about white privilege and minority devaluation; the media take seriously the victimization of white females.

In terms of other sympathetic themes, I found stories about both white and Latina female victims were significantly more likely than stories about black female victims to describe the victim as preyed upon by a predator stranger. This theme perpetuates the “stranger danger” mentality. Moreover, this theme points to the crime’s unexpectedness and insinuates that these females needed protection from cunning criminals. This theme garners sympathy from readers and viewers because these females could not protect themselves. Interestingly, research indicates minority females are more likely to be victimized by strangers than white females (Lauritsen & Heimer, 2009). However, this study’s findings do not clearly reflect this reality; my findings indicate stories about black females rarely describe attacks by predator strangers.

Like the “attacked by a predator stranger” theme, the themes of the “safe environment” and “random nature of the victimization” point to the crime’s unexpectedness. Indeed, stories about white female victims were significantly more likely to describe the victim’s safe environment than stories about black and Latina female victims, while stories about white female victims were significantly more likely describe the crime as “random” (i.e., unable to be anticipated or avoided) than stories about black female victims. Simply stated, these themes point to the random and shocking nature of white females’ victimizations, which leads the media consumer to feel sympathy for these victims. In stark contrast to the “unsafe environment” theme, the “safe environment” theme suggests that white female victims reside in primarily safe neighborhoods and within safe, loving families. Importantly, research shows victimization rates are higher in low-income neighborhoods with high minority populations (Sackett, 2016).

Stories about white female victims were also significantly more likely to describe the victim as religious than stories about Latina female victims. On one hand, this finding is unsurprising given the stereotype that white females are pure and angelic (Edwards, 2017; Wanzo, 2008). On the other hand, this finding is surprising given that religion is an important aspect of life for white, black, and Latino/a people in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center's (2014) Religious Landscape Study, 75 percent of black people, 59 percent of Latino/a people, and 49 percent of white people surveyed said religion was a "very important" part of their lives (para. 3). In other words, white people are not more religious than their black and Latina counterparts (Pew Research Center, 2014), so the lack of religiosity mentioned in the stories about Latina females is surprising. This finding is important because it illuminates the unique ways in which white female victims are humanized by the media.

Stories about white female victims were also significantly more likely than stories about black and Latina female victims to describe the victim as in a perilous situation far from her home. This theme is similar to the "damsel in distress" theme that other researchers have discussed in their work examining news portrayals of Jessica Lynch (Kumar, 2004; Lobasz, 2008). Importantly, the "female in peril far from home" theme regularly appeared in stories about white females in Iraq. I believe such a theme serves to foster stereotypes about the vulnerability of white females; these females would be better off staying home where they could be protected from harm. Because of the overrepresentation of victimization in Iraq, I argue this theme also serves to reinforce the belief that females are incapable of protecting themselves in warzones. In the real world, female veterans face harmful stereotypes about their vulnerability and their lack of

strength (Anchan, Hightower, & Cruz, 2014; Minsberg, 2015). Furthermore, one could argue that this theme perpetuates Islamophobia by portraying white females as common targets of Muslim predators.

After analyzing how a female victim's race/ethnicity affected the likelihood that a news story would include specific unsympathetic and sympathetic themes, I then assessed whether the victim's race/ethnicity influenced the story's overall narrative at the multivariate level. Previous research on differential news coverage about female victims has never included multivariate analyses.

Regarding my multivariate findings, stories about white female victims were the most likely to produce narratives that were sympathetic of the victim overall, even after controlling for several important covariates. In truth, this finding is unsurprising given the "ideal" victim stereotype, notions about white privilege, and the devaluation of minority victims' lives. However, this is the first study of its kind to examine this relationship at the multivariate level, and this finding illuminates the pervasiveness of the "ideal" victim stereotype. Importantly, there were no significant differences in the likelihood that a story would result in an overall sympathetic narrative (versus an overall unsympathetic narrative) for black versus Latina female victims. This is an important finding because, at the multivariate level, minority female victims are portrayed similarly regardless of their race. While differences in overall narratives were reserved to differences between white and minority females, findings differed slightly for white versus black females and for white versus Latina females. Relative to stories about white female victims, stories about black female victims were more likely to be unsympathetic versus sympathetic overall. The likelihood that a story would have a neutral versus either a sympathetic or

unsympathetic narrative did not differ for white and black female victims. But, relative to their white female counterparts, stories about Latina female victims were more likely to produce overall narratives that were unsympathetic to the victim (rather than sympathetic) or neutral (rather than sympathetic). These differences across race provide a justification for my separate examination of black and Latina female victims at the multivariate level.

Other variables—such as the race of the offender, the age of the victim, and whether the paper was published in a liberal-voting city—affected the overall story narrative. I found that the stories that contained mention of white offenders were more likely to result in narratives that tended to be unsympathetic to victims (versus sympathetic overall). In contrast, the stories that indicated that the offender was a member of a racial/ethnic minority group (or where the offender's race was not provided) produced narratives more sympathetic overall to the victim. This finding aligns with discussions of negative racial/ethnic stereotypes about minorities (specifically, their propensity to engage in crime). With regard to negative stereotypes present in the media, Welch (2007) argued that “young black male” is used as a euphemism for “criminal predator” (p. 276), and Rome (2004) argued black men are portrayed as demons. Moreover, Dixon and Azocar (2007) found Latinos were stereotyped as violent. With these stereotypes in mind, I believe stories about stereotypical offenders (i.e., minorities) are apt to give sympathy to crime victims. Indeed, females victimized by stereotypical offenders could not protect themselves from criminal predators.

Relative to stories about adult female victims, stories about young female victims were 5.2 times more likely to result in overall sympathetic narratives (versus

unsympathetic narratives). Moreover, stories about minor victims were four times more likely to produce overall neutral narratives (versus unsympathetic narratives). Put another way, unsympathetic narratives were very unlikely when news stories focused on young female victims. These findings are unsurprising given young victims are thought to be innocent and defenseless (Greer, 2007), which are characteristics that foster concern and sympathy. I also found stories produced from newspapers located in liberal-voting cities were almost three times more likely to result in stories with sympathetic overall narratives versus unsympathetic narratives.³⁷ In order to make sense of this finding, I more closely examined the liberal paper versus non-liberal paper divide and found that more than half the stories disseminated from newspapers located in politically-mixed cities (Phoenix, Miami, and Houston) featured minority victims (and, overall, stories about minority victims resulted in less sympathetic coverage than stories about white female victims). While the victim's race/ethnicity may not be the reason why stories from the *Miami Herald*, *The Arizona Republic*, and the *Houston Chronicle* tended to produce less sympathetic narratives of the victim than stories from *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post*, other untested differences across papers (such as newsroom culture or lack of diversity within newsrooms) may explain the differences revealed across papers. With that said, this study's focus was not on whether a given newspaper (or group of newspapers) affected overall narratives about victims. Future researchers may wish to examine this complex

³⁷ It is worth noting that D'Alessio and Allen's (2000) meta-analysis of content analyses of newspapers found "no evidence whatsoever of a monolithic media liberal bias in the newspaper...[and] the same can be said of a conservative bias" (p. 149). In fact, members of the "prestige press" (which includes *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*) pride themselves on balanced reporting (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004).

topic further. Moreover, future researchers may wish to expand this area of inquiry by examining newspaper stories published in conservative-voting cities.

Limitations

While this dissertation extends beyond the scope of prior research in the area, there are several limitations worthy of discussion. First, the dataset for this dissertation was comprised of stories from 2006. While I acknowledge these stories are now a bit dated, the importance (and relevance) of race/ethnicity has not diminished in the 12 years since these stories were published. To be clear, racial and ethnic tension is a staple of American life and has been since the enslavement of Africans (Gans, 2005). Put another way, racial tension is part and parcel to American history. Indeed, there have been (and will continue to be) cultural shifts in America due to fluctuations in racial and ethnic relations. Certainly, the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, the creation of the 13th Amendment, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, Japanese internment during World War II, the Jim Crow Era, the Civil Rights movement, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Power movement, the rise of mass incarceration, the election of the first black President, and recent discussions of border control serve as powerful examples of the continued relevance of race and ethnicity in American history, culture, and life (Kendi, 2017; “History of Racism and Immigration,” n.d.; PBS, n.d.; Salomon, Quiroz, Potapchuk, & Villarosa, 2014). More to the point, race and ethnicity continue to be at the forefront of American news and culture, as seen in the Black Lives Matter movement and within the heated racial and ethnic rhetoric used by some politicians. Simply stated, dismissing stories from 2006 as “too old” to examine differences in race/ethnicity would be to ignore the role that race and ethnicity have

played (and will continue to play) in American life. With that said, I acknowledge that a crucial “next step” to this research is to compare the 2006 stories to another timepoint. Indeed, I hope to create a corresponding 2017 dataset to compare 2006 stories to stories written after President Trump’s election. Given President Trump’s rhetoric regarding Latino people, it will be interesting to see if racial/ethnic differences in Latina victims’ representations vary (or persist) across timepoints. Moreover, it is possible that female victims’ portrayals will change because of the #MeToo movement. Already, critics argue the #MeToo movement is excluding black female victims’ voices (Constante, 2018).

Another perceived limitation of this study is its focus on print news. While online and television news media corner a large share of the news market (Rosenstiel et al., 2011), Print newspapers are still worthy of in-depth analysis. As previously stated, research shows print and online news sources contained similar lead stories for the first 12 hours of the day (Greer & Mensing, 2004), and stories in daily newspapers are often represented on the nightly television news (Chermak, 1994). Moreover, many adults rely on newspapers for information about crime in their communities or more broadly (Rosenstiel et al., 2011), and newspapers provide valuable daily snapshots of American life (Stanton Communications, 2013). Furthermore, this study’s focus on broadsheet journalistic enterprises is important because, in a recent study, Pennycook and Rand (2018) found both Democrats and Republicans trusted mainstream news sources (such as CNN) more than “hyper-partisan or fake news sources” (such as Breitbart) (p. 1).³⁸ With that said, future researchers should examine the portrayals of female victims in online

³⁸ Pennycook & Rand’s (2018) study did not examine readers’ perceptions of the sources used in this study. Still, it is important that people across the political spectrum trust mainstream sources more than fringe sources.

news stories. To take it one step further, future researchers should also examine the ways in which crime news is spread via social media, given that social media has become a primary avenue for the exploration of social issues (Lipschultz, 2015) and because social media allow consumers to engage in the news-making process across racial, spatial, and socioeconomic lines (Lipschultz, 2017).

Another limitation of this research is its narrow “intersectional” focus. Although my concentration on white, black, and Latina female victims goes beyond typical white versus non-white comparisons, more can be done to examine differences in representation for other racial categories (e.g., Asians, Native American, Middle Easterners).³⁹ For this dissertation, there were too few stories about females of other races/ethnicities to allow for statistical analysis. Moreover, research on the differences in media representation across sexual orientation, gender identity, (dis)ability, and socioeconomic status are important academic endeavors. With that said, the front-page stories present in this dataset rarely (if ever) discussed the victim’s sexual orientation, gender identity, possible disabilities, or level of wealth.

Another limitation of this research was the lack of focus on the offender. Most of the time, crime stories feature information about both the victim(s) and the offender(s). To this end, during the coding for this dissertation, I examined whether the story focused primarily on the victim, the offender, or had a mixed focus. Based on subsequent chi-square analyses (tabular results not provided), I found that stories about white and Latina female victims were significantly more likely to focus little or no attention on the victim

³⁹ I sometimes used photographs to determine a female victim’s race/ethnicity. In other words, I sometimes categorized victims based upon their skin tone. Future researchers should carefully consider this type of coding because the citizens of the United States are becoming increasingly mixed race (Tsui, 2018).

compared to the stories about black female victims. In other words, in stories about white and Latina female victims, it was somewhat common for the victim to be a small part of the story. Focus (or lack thereof) on the victim is not necessarily negative or positive. To clarify the issue, I believe future research should examine how stories are spun for victims and offenders simultaneously. For example, stories may portray white female victims sympathetically while portraying their offenders unsympathetically. To that end, I found stories that featured minority offenders were significantly more likely to result in overall narratives that were sympathetic to the victim. More research needs to be done to clarify how portrayals of offenders may affect portrayals of victims.

Finally, more research needs to be done on the types of photographs used in crime news. In this dissertation, I did not find significant differences in the inclusion of photographs in the stories about white, black, and Latina female victims. With that said, a more robust, in-depth look at these photographs (and their content) may be warranted. For example, I would argue a photograph featuring a small casket sitting alone amongst a display of flowers is a sympathetic image, albeit one that does not directly show the victim. To provide another example, a photograph showing multiple people weeping inside a church may be viewed as a sympathetic image. While this in-depth analysis of photographs was beyond the scope of this dissertation, I challenge future researchers to think creatively about how news story photographs may be examined for content and meaning.

Conclusion

While this study has its limitations, I believe the findings add to a burgeoning area of critical race feminist research by showing that victims of various races/ethnicities are

portrayed differently in the news media. Certainly, I found support for some of my primary expectations. At the bivariate level, I found support for my expectation that stories about black female victims would contain more unsympathetic thematic elements than stories about white female victims, and I found stories about white female victims contained more sympathetic themes than the stories about both black and Latina female victims. However, I also found differences in the ways in which Latina female victims and black female victims were portrayed at the bivariate level. Specifically, regarding unsympathetic narrative themes, black female victims were significantly more likely to be described as “bad” people and as living in “unsafe environments” compared to Latina female victims. With that said, at the multivariate level, the differences in overall story narratives between stories about black and Latina female victims did not differ statistically. At the multivariate level, stories about both black and Latina female victims were more likely to produce unsympathetic overall narratives (versus overall sympathetic narratives) than stories about white females. Although differences in story content overall for black and Latina female victims did not materialize, differences favoring white female victims (when compared with both Latina and black female victims) align with Greer’s (2007) “hierarchy of victimization” (p. 23) and Blumenbach’s racial hierarchy (as discussed by Gabiddon, 2015).

In front-page newspaper stories from the 2006 calendar year, black female victims were portrayed less sympathetically than their Latina counterparts⁴⁰ at the bivariate level

⁴⁰ Due to President Trump’s negative commentary about the Latino/a community, it is possible that portrayals of Latina female victims may be more unsympathetic today than they were in 2006. Some examples of Trump’s negative commentary include calling Mexicans “rapists, criminals,” and “bad hombres,” while continuing to call for the creation of a border wall (Thompson, 2017, para. 1). But, many would argue that Trump’s rhetoric is designed to appeal to a base with long-held negative beliefs about minorities in general. In other words, Trump’s ideas are not new. With that said, a comparison of

and their white counterparts at the bivariate and multivariate levels. At the multivariate level, portrayals of Latina victims were more likely to be both unsympathetic (versus sympathetic) and neutral (versus sympathetic) than portrayals of white female victims. Overall narratives for black female victims also tended to be unsympathetic (rather than sympathetic) compared to portrayals of white female victims, but differences did not emerge in the likelihood that a story would result in a neutral (versus sympathetic) overall narrative. I believe the unsympathetic portrayals of black female victims at both the bivariate and multivariate levels can be ideologically connected to the present-day Black Lives Matter movement. Indeed, founders of the Black Lives Matter movement argue police officers (and citizens) view black people as more threatening and violent than others, leading to over-aggressive policing tactics and a disproportionate number of officer-involved shootings involving black suspects (Davary, 2017; Edwards & Harris, 2016).⁴¹ While this study is not a study of portrayals of offenders, the negative treatment black female victims receive from the media point to a continued racism in contemporary society, with white people being viewed as “deserving” and minorities being viewed as the opposite (Collins, 2016).

The sympathetic portrayals of white female victims—and the contrasting unsympathetic portrayals of minority female victims—lead to some important questions about how these portrayals materialize. It is possible these stereotypes are created at the “news source” level. Indeed, commonly cited sources, such as police reports, may contain

portrayals across time periods (2006 versus today) is an essential “next step” in the trajectory of this research.

⁴¹ Racial profiling, sometimes called Driving While Black, is another real-world example of the tensions that exist between some officers and minority citizens (Harris, 2002; Gabiddon, 2003). Startlingly, Ramirez, McDevitt, and Farrell (2000) found “72% of Black men between the ages of 18 and 34 believed they had been stopped [by police] because of their race” (p. 4).

stereotypes about victims. If this is the case, then the stereotypes portrayed in the media may be produced well before the news-making process. Future research should examine the overlap in language between police reports and subsequent media coverage. Along the same vein, it is possible that unsympathetic and sympathetic portrayals are created and/or perpetuated at the news-making level by reporters and/or editors. In line with gatekeeping theory, it is possible media gatekeepers' personal beliefs about certain victims may influence the coverage female victims receive. Future research should examine gate-keeping in the modern era; specifically, newsmakers' decision-making processes during the creation of crime news should be examined. Moreover, it is possible that positive and negative stereotypes exist at both the "news source" and "news-making" levels. Put another way, it is conceivable that police officers and newsmakers alike have preconceived ideas about specific victims. While this study is the first to provide evidence that the "ideal" victim stereotype is present in the news media at the multivariate level, more can be done to examine *how* these portrayals made it through the gate.

Critical race feminism provided the foundation for this study. Critical race feminist scholars argue the experiences of females will differ by their race/ethnicity and that white females will receive the best treatment due to their lack of minority status (Belknap, 2014; Potter, 2013). For this reason, I examined differences between the portrayals of white, black, and Latina female victims, and I found white female victims were portrayed more sympathetically than their minority counterparts at both the bivariate and multivariate level. While I believe this finding is unsurprising given the "ideal" victim stereotype, I argue the persistence of this stereotype has troubling

consequences. Indeed, Crenshaw (1988) and hooks (1992) argued the construction of white females as good and ideal created a counterimage of minority females as less than ideal. To this end, in 2006 front-page newspaper stories, some victims appeared worthy of our attention, while others did not. These representations may impact the perceptions news readers (and criminal justice professionals) have about certain victims. As previously mentioned, white female victims and minority females do not receive the same degree of justice (Crenshaw, 1991; Holcomb et al., 2004), and these portrayals can help explain why.

Simply stated, I believe this study's findings provide support for critical race feminism by showing that the experiences of minority females differ from those of white females. Moreover, I believe this study illuminates that the "media are one means through which racism pervades" (Yosso, 2002, p. 53). As a critical race feminist scholar, I urge future researchers to continue to examine the differential treatment minority female victims receive in the news media and beyond. As argued by Solorzano (1997), people need to understand the experiences of minority people to effectively analyze and understand how racial subordination persists in American culture.

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Appendix 1. Original Coding for Independent Variables (n = 266)

Variables	N	%
<i>Primary Independent Variable</i>		
Victim Race/Ethnicity		
White	125	47.0
Black	77	28.9
Latina	64	24.1
<i>Covariates</i>		
Victim Age		
Child (12 and under)	83	31.2
Teen Minor (13-17)	27	10.2
Young Adult (18-29)	79	29.7
Adult (30-49)	44	16.5
Older Adult (50+)	17	6.4
Not Stated / Given	16	6.0
Offender Age		
Minor (17 or younger)	12	4.5
Young Adult (18-29)	73	27.4
Adult (30+)	68	25.6
Not Stated / Given	113	42.5
Offender Race/Ethnicity		
White	66	24.8
Black	51	19.2
Latino/a	28	10.5
Middle Eastern	17	6.4
Not Stated / Given	104	39.1
Offender Gender		
Male	177	66.5
Female	24	9.0
Male & Female Offenders	12	4.5
Not given	53	19.9
Interracial Victimization		
Same Race	96	36.1
Different Races	66	24.8
Not Sure / Race Not Stated	104	39.1
Victim-Offender Relationship		
Intimate	16	6.0
Family	31	11.7
Friend/Acquaintance	38	14.3
Stranger	74	27.8
Not Stated or Known	107	40.2
Crime Type		
Non-violent	12	4.5
Violent (not sexual/murder)	47	17.7
Violent (sex victimization)	32	12.0
Murder	175	65.8

Appendix 1 continues next page.

Appendix 1. (continued). Original Coding for Independent Variables (n = 266)

Variables	N	%
Location of Victimization		
At/Near Home	95	35.7
In City/State, but Not Home	123	46.2
Out of State/Country	26	9.8
Not Specified	22	8.3
Multiple Victims		
One Victim	135	50.8
Two + Victims	131	49.2
Multiple Offenders		
One Offender	137	51.5
Two + Offenders	93	35.0
Not Specified	36	13.5

Appendix 2A. Correlation Matrix for Independent Variables

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	White Victim	1.00													
2	Black Victim	-.60*	1.00												
3	Latina Victim	-.53*	.36*	1.00											
4	Minor Victim	.04	.05	-.10	1.00										
5	White Offender	.26*	-.08	-.22*	.15*	1.00									
6	Male Offender	-.04	.03	.01	-.07	.15*	1.00								
7	Offender Yo. Adult (18-29)	-.26*	.20*	.09	-.00	.12	.12	1.00							
8	Interracial Victimization	-.02	-.08	.10	-.34*	.07	.19*	.19*	1.00						
9	Stranger Offender	-.01	.01	.00	-.10	.05	.23*	.24*	.38*	1.00					
10	Murder Offense	-.08	-.12	.22*	.24*	-.01	-.01	.00	-.27*	-.17*	1.00				
11	Victimized At/Near Home	-.06	.13*	-.07	.28*	.04	-.05	-.02	-.30*	-.22*	.19*	1.00			
12	One Victim Described	-.13*	.26*	-.13*	.14*	.08	.15*	.08	-.10	.02	-.09	.12*	1.00		
13	One Offender Described	.07	-.14*	.07	.13*	.09	.28*	-.01	-.23*	-.09	.28*	.13*	.05	1.00	
14	Liberal Paper	.07	.14*	-.23*	-.00	.04	.01	.05	.06	.13*	-.18*	-.05	.06	.00	1.00

