

#SAYHERNAME and Tell Her Story: Investigating News Media Coverage of Black Women Killed by Police Violence

Jasmine K Cooper
Morgan State University

Abstract

This project investigates the lack of online news media coverage of two Black women killed by police: Rekia Boyd and Korryn Gaines. Despite their premature deaths, news coverage and mentions of these individuals in three of the top digitally circulating U.S. news sites, *CNN*, *The New York Times*, and *Fox News*, are far lower than for two Black men and one White woman killed under similar circumstances. Ultimately, these disparities in coverage speak to a tendency of media to disregard, erase, and make invisible police violence as one of the manifestations of intersecting oppressions in the lives of Black women.

Keywords: Black women, racism, sexism, news media, police violence

Jasmine K. Cooper, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Morgan State University. Along with a B.S. in African American Studies from Eastern Michigan University, Dr. Cooper holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Sociology from Michigan State University, with specializations in Black feminist theories; contemporary approaches to racial inequality; and media framing, power, and discourse.

Presently, instances of white-on-Blackⁱ police and vigilante violence against Black victims have captured significant national attention. Yet, by-and-large, much of the media attention has centered Black men.ⁱⁱ Facing similar types of police violence in Black bodies, the deaths of Black women like Charleena Lyles, Janese Talton-Jackson, Sandra Bland, Tanisha Anderson, Breonna Taylor, Renisha McBride, Rekia Boyd, and Korryn Gaines are also of consequence. However, with few exceptions, the persistent killings and non-fatal brutal treatment of Black women have been comparatively overlooked by major news media outlets.

Rather than an interrogation of their killings, this article investigates online news media treatment of these women – the erasures, indirect silencing, and lack of media attention to the violence they experienced.ⁱⁱⁱ These silences serve to mask, erase and ultimately make invisible the raced and gendered forms of state-sponsored violence to which Black women are vulnerable (Mowatt et al., 2013; Neely, 2015).

That is, the media silence surrounding these women fails to bring attention to the concrete vulnerabilities to police violence they experience *because* they are Black women, while at the same time bringing attention (in some ways) to the systemic violence experienced by Black men.^{iv} Yet, in failing to discuss, name, or humanize Black women who are victimized by police, certain national news publishers are complicit in erasing racialized police maltreatment of Black women, as well as the concrete violence and marginalization to which they remain potentially subject.

This disparity between the remembrance of Boyd and those of the others reflects a popular conception that racial discrimination and violence in America, past and present, are almost exclusively aimed at men: When we talk about lynching, police brutality and mass incarceration, we are almost always talking about African-American men, not women. Being a target of racism is seen as patrilineal, a social and political disadvantage that Black fathers unwillingly bequeath to their sons but not their daughters. The result is a dyad of vulnerability and invisibility that most African-American women, including me, learn to navigate at an early age. (Tillet, 2015)

Consequently, such media erasure results in the invisibility of Black women's vulnerability to police violence.

To be clear, this article does not attempt to minimize the very real threat of violence experienced by Black men. Black men are subject to a unique history of lynching and being viewed through the controlling image of the Black brute, used to justify violence exacted on them as means of social control in the early 1900s and beyond (Bay, 2010). Instead, the aim of the article is to highlight the similar, yet unique racialized and gendered victimization to which Black women are vulnerable.^v

To this end, I compare rates of coverage of Korryn Gaines' and Rekia Boyd's killings to those of Black men who died at police hands, Ramarley Graham and Alton Sterling.^{vi} I investigate the coverage of these individuals by searching their names for articles published in three of the highest circulating digital news sites, *CNN*, *Fox News Brand*, and *The New York Times*

Brand.

Hypothesis: Despite their premature deaths, news article coverage of these two individuals is far lower than these figures for two Black men killed at roughly the same times through police/vigilante intervention (Collins, 2008; Harris-Perry, 2011; Jiwani, 2006; Neely, 2015).

Similarly, to interrogate the intersection of gender with race, I compare rates of coverage for Boyd and Gaines, to digital circulation rates for Justine Ruszczyk's death, a white woman killed by a Black Somali American police officer in Minnesota. Ultimately, these disparities in coverage speak to a tendency of the media to overlook, erase, disregard, and make invisible the varied manifestations of intersecting oppression in the lives of Black women (Mowatt et al., 2013; Neely, 2015). Yet, as is evinced by the disparities in coverage between Black and white women of state-sponsored violence, when white women die at police hands, it is officially time to report on, and resolve the issue (Hill, 2016). In all, the article argues media disregard and erasure of Black women's vulnerability to police violence speaks to the overall tendency to overlook Black women's oppression in the society (Neely, 2015).

Black Feminist Theory and Literature

Gender, Silencing, "Symbolic Annihilation"

Tuchman (1996, p. 12) addresses the marginality and underrepresentation of women in media, noting

the very underrepresentation of women, including their stereotypic portrayal,

may symbolically capture the position of women in American society – their real lack of power. It bespeaks their “symbolic annihilation” by the media...just as representation in the media signifies social existence, so too underrepresentation and (by extension) trivialization and condemnation indicate symbolic annihilation.

Lazar (2005) and Tuchman (1996) highlight similar processes, and provide feminist contributions critical discourse theory. Lazar (2005, p. 1) addresses the increasingly subtle nature of gendered power relationships and their production, reproduction, and resistance through text and talk. Further, Lazar identifies concrete manifestations of these subtle hegemonic relationships in work and political life. Lazar's (2005, p. 19) “marked inclusion” critiques the “benevolent inclusion of critical and/or feminist discourse studies from non-Western geographical regions in international for a, but marked as ‘other’ instead of mainstreamed.”

This project also rests heavily on Black feminist theoretical traditions. Commonalities among Black feminist theorists of intersectionality also include approach to structures of race, class, and gender oppression as intersecting/interlocking, mutually-reinforced social structures (Combahee River Collective, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242; Collins, 2008). They experience membership in a racial minority differently than Black men, who have access to the privilege of gender majority status. Similarly, white women have access to many privileges of being a part of the dominant racial group in the society, though

they are members of a gender minority (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1252).

A number of Black feminist and other feminist researchers have advanced new metaphors and lenses to address the silencing, dismissal, and disregard that Black women navigate, often reinforced and perpetuated in media. Interstices, for instance, interrogates symbolic representations of Black women, highlighting intentional discursive silences that foster feelings of non-belonging, marginalization, and invisibility for members of the group (Spillers, 1984). Such silences may symbolically overlook Black women, negate their belonging in certain spaces, and minimize existence as complex beings (Harris-Perry, 2011; Lorde, 2007; Mowatt et al., 2013). Similarly, Harris-Perry (2011) developed the concept of the crooked room, to describe the constant struggle against a longstanding history of racial and gender stereotypes with which Black women must contend.

When they confront race and gender stereotypes, Black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some Black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion.... To understand why Black women's public actions and political strategies sometimes seem tilted in ways that accommodate the degrading stereotypes about them, it is important to appreciate the structural constraints that influence their behavior. It can be hard to stand up straight in a crooked room. (Harris-Perry 2011, p. 29)

Other researchers help illustrate the ways "standing in a crooked room" becomes

especially difficult, when Black women are represented in media. Specifically, regarding news stories, the overt identification of marginalized racial, gender, or sexual characteristics to ensure an individual's or group's classification as non-white, non-male, non-cisgender, non-heterosexual, non-mainstream – that is, other – alongside the failure to name powerful, privileged groups, thereby mainstreaming, and universalizing, the latter identities as normal, and their perspectives as representative of the taken-for-granted knowledge of the society.

Mowatt et al. (2013) note when Black women are discussed in media, they are often elucidated as hyper visible in problematic ways that harken back to historical stereotypes about Black women's over sexuality, attitudinally, rebelliousness, and lack of femininity. Members of this group have historically been inaccurately framed in news, scholarly, and popular discourses as bestial, physically sturdy, less feminine, more capable of withstanding pain, and overall, less human than the oppositionally-positioned, normative, unspoken, frail, dependent stereotypical conjuring's of "true White womanhood" (Harris-Perry, 2011 Winfrey Harris, 2015). Further, according to Mowatt et al. (2013), when they are not represented in these fashions, Black women are otherwise systemically erased and invisible in larger society.

Consequently, when popular culture repeatedly omits Black women, or draws on controlling images of Black womanhood, the larger outcome is the reproduction of Black women's oppression (Hill Collins, 1986). The erasure, invisibility, and marked representations of Black women victims of police violence contributes to their symbolic

annihilation (Mowatt et al., 2013; Tuchman, 1996).

However, not only are women marginalized and symbolically annihilated in the media, but race, gender, and class oppression are mutually constructed. Black women, trying to stand in a crooked room, experience various types of symbolic annihilation simultaneously. And with that symbolic annihilation, they are erased, and their oppressions, particularly their vulnerability to state-sponsored violence, are largely invisible in mass media. This critical feminist discourse conceptual tool can be expanded and applied with Black feminist theory.

Discourse

According to discourse scholars, the society is constrained by structures of race, class and gender oppression that are partially upheld by work the common-sense-making media does in presenting people of color and whites in ways that bespeak and normalize the racial and gender stratification of society. Media representations of people of color are constrained by power relationships that have historically influenced the development and presentations of media images, particularly regarding people of African descent in the U.S. Consequently, packages of ideas that surround the presentation of media messages about or including women of color may be connected to longstanding racial stereotypes and ideologies that were created to justify their position within a racist and sexist social order, and continue to do that discursive work today (Jiwani, 2006; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Meyers, 2004; Van Dijk, 1991, 1993, 2000).

These theorists highlight 1) historical structures of racism, sexism, and classism that have continued to influence options for representation of non-white, non-male, non-cisgender, non-heterosexual groups, especially women of color; 2) the ownership of institutions of cultural production by a predominately white, wealthy class of men (Semmes, 1995); 3) strategic naming and silences that may harken to historical and stereotypical tropes, and reinforce the normalcy, universal nature of whiteness and maleness, alongside the othering, abnormality, and naming of difference, (e.g., nonwhiteness, youth, “urbanness”) (Jiwani, 2006, p. 4; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Reid-Brinkley, 2012). The way this normalization reinforces and reproduces white supremacy is by distorting its presence and making whiteness the unnamed universal. Further, these scholars unearth the semantic moves that frequently, though now subtly, mark women and people of color as problematic, different, other, and subordinate (Davis & Gandy, 1999; Entman & Rojecki, 2004; Feagin, 2013; Gandy, 1996; Meyers, 2004; Reid-Brinkley, 2012; Semmes, 1995; Van Dijk, 1991, 1993, 2000).

The strengths of this approach are in its ability to capture historically problematic representations of nonwhite groups, their connections to the maintenance of racial, gender, and class inequality through media representations. Additionally, the hegemonic approach does capture the disproportionate representation in ownership of modes of cultural production by white male elites, and the historical use of media, by those elites, to secure their positions at the type of a racially and sexually stratified social hierarchy.

Methods

Coverage

Each individual's name was used as a search term in three of the most highly-circulating digital news sites in the U.S.: *The CNN Network*, *Fox News Digital Network*, and *The New York Times Brand*.^{vii} These were selected for the availability of verification resources for rates of coverage, including search engines for the publication sites, cnn.com and foxnews.com.

Results were limited to articles (i.e., "stories") published from the date of death to July 30, 2019.^{viii} Videos and articles that did not actually mention subjects' full names in the article content were excluded. Searches were conducted for exact hits on articles including individual names (e.g., "Korryn Gaines") specifically mentioned within the titles and/or written content of articles. Because this project centers on online news coverage, articles in traditional print were excluded from the count. Often, for *The New York Times*, articles with the parallel titles and content were printed in traditional format, as well as published online.

1. Rekia Boyd – Black woman, 22, unarmed, killed 21-Mar-12 by off-duty police officer in Chicago, IL
2. Korryn Gaines – Black woman, 23, armed, killed 1-Aug-16 by police barricaded in home in Baltimore, MD – videos of police entry
3. Ramarley Graham – Black man, 18, unarmed, killed 2-Feb-12 by police in home without warrant in New York, NY
4. Alton Sterling – Black man, unarmed, 37, killed, shot point blank 5-Jul-16 by police in Baton Rouge, LA selling CDs– video of shooting

5. Justine Ruszczyk – White woman, 40, unarmed, killed in front of home by Minneapolis, MN police on 17-Jul-17

To illustrate disparities in rates of coverage for Black men and women killed by police, I gathered the total number of articles published online via *CNN*, *The New York Times Brand*, and *Fox News Digital Network* for Rekia Boyd, Korryn Gaines, Alton Sterling and Ramarley Graham. Next, I compared rates of coverage, i.e., "article hits," for the four Black men and women included in the sample. Table 1 and Table 2 display the results of this comparison.

Focusing on national audiences provides a lens into the different levels of national attention to each death, as compared to the police-related deaths of two Black men, Ramarley Graham and Alton Sterling. This was done to illustrate that, as compared to Black men killed by police under similar circumstances, Black women are often ignored, overlooked, and dismissed as victims of racialized state-sponsored violence although they are vulnerable to it (Hill, 2016).

Across three of the major digital news sites, there were obvious disparities in the number of articles published online for Korryn Gaines and Rekia Boyd, as compared to Alton Sterling and Ramarley Graham. Between 2012 and 2017, *CNN*, *The New York Times Brand*, and *Fox News*, published 37 articles on the killing of Rekia Boyd, and accompanying adjudication (**Table 1**). Ramarley Graham, an eighteen-year-old killed by New York Police, received a total of 98 article hits during the same period (**Table 2**). Similarly, between 2016-2019, these publishers issued 30 articles on the death of Korryn Gaines

(**Table 1**). Alton Sterling was discussed in 683 articles in the aforementioned years (**Table 2**). Updates, information, and discussions about the experiences of Graham and Sterling collectively far exceeded those of Boyd and Gaines, largely because of the number of articles on Sterling.

Comparing Rates of Coverage – Race

To illustrate disparities in rates of coverage for Black women and white women killed by police, I gathered the total number of articles published online via *CNN*, *The New York Times Brand*, and *Fox News Digital Network* for Rekia Boyd, Koryn Gaines, and Justine Ruszczyk/Damond. Next, I compared rates of coverage, i.e., “article hits,” for these individuals. Table 1 and Table 3 display the results of this comparison.

As noted above, between 2012 and 2019, *CNN*, *The New York Times Brand*, and *Fox News*, published 67 articles specifically naming Rekia Boyd and/or Korryn Gaines. Contrarily, Ruszczy was discussed in 215 articles by the aforementioned digital publishers. Updates, information, and discussions about the experiences of Ruszczy far exceeded those of Boyd and Gaines, collectively. That is, in the two years following the death of Justine Ruszczy, the former received *over three times more* coverage than Gaines and Boyd in multiple years following their deaths. Such a finding is not surprising, as Neely (2015) and Jiwani & Young (2006) highlighted similar results in their comparisons of coverage of white and Black women victims of violence.

Discussion & Conclusions

By the time of its publication, this manuscript may appear to provide a retrospective look into news media coverage (or lack thereof) surrounding murders of Black women by police between 2012-2019. Yet, the time period selected for this project is of consequence. The persistent vulnerability and identity-based marginalization experienced by Black women exists within a larger context of racial attitudes that deny the continued significance such differential treatment, disregard inequality, and fail to give it attention. At the same time, subtle scapegoating, xenophobic, anti-immigrant political rhetoric were used in the 2016 election to silence vulnerable groups; to align supporters against “others” on the grounds of Americanness (read: whiteness) – and more concretely, to later justify the execution of presidential mandates intended to restrict women’s rights, and immigration to the U.S. As such, investigating media that address racialized police violence during this period provides a unique window into the significance of the topic to publishers, along with expectations of importance, and readership.

It is of great significance that Black women victims of police violence are ignored by large news media outlets. As shown by Neely (2015), Jiwani & Young (2006), and other scholars of critical media and discourse theory, media representations tend to influence readers’ responses and subsequent public outcry. This applies to both rates of representation (e.g., news coverage), and styles or “framing” of victims to audiences (e.g., ideas used to describe victims and shape their stories for readers). Put simply, when police killings of Black women are under-covered, public attention is not drawn to these atrocities, and

by extension, public outcry may be limited thereby. This situates state-sponsored violence against Black women as anomalies – outliers that do not require public responses. As such, the lack of coverage and attention for police violence against Black women can also limit public responses, (e.g., calls for changes to policing).

In failing to discuss, name, or humanize Black women who are victimized by police; in overlooking responses to oppression that address it directly, certain national news publishers are complicit in silencing/minimizing unfair treatment of Black women, as well as the concrete violence and marginalization to which they remain vulnerable. In short, the underrepresentation, invisibility and marked representations of Black women victims of police violence contributes to their symbolic annihilation; the erasure of the violence exacted upon their bodies; and the invisibility of such violence to members of the public (Mowatt et al. 2013; Tuchman 1997).

Ultimately, however, the problem of police violence against Black bodies persists, and Black lives are continuously eliminated prematurely. Often, these killings are followed shortly thereafter by other (often young) Black lives cut short by state-sponsored powers.^{ix}

Scholars and activists have specifically addressed the unique types of violence, marginalization, silencing and dismissal to which Black women are vulnerable in contemporary U.S. society. For instance, the #sayhername hashtag was popularized on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms^x to spotlight the lack of media attention to the murder of Sandra Bland and

other Black women, as compared to male victims of police violence.^{xi} This emergent protest movement continues to highlight police/vigilante brutality against, and prosecutorial disregard for Black bodies through social media, boycotts, and publicized protests.^{xii} The names and stories of Breonna Taylor, Korryn Gaines, Ma’Kiha Bryant, and others have been publicized due to this hashtag, and the democratizing power of social media and other forms of digital media dissemination.

Other scholars have investigated the media treatment of Black women and women of color who are victims of violence (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Neely, 2015). This article is unique, as many other studies have not compared rates of coverage for Black women to that of Black men, and white women, in order to access their erasure and invisibility in that fashion.

Ultimately, I anticipated significant national coverage of Gaines, as police both killed her, and injured her five-year-old son for failing to nonviolently de-escalate their interaction. That is, prior to her murder, Gaines allegedly threatened police with her gun. This is likely why Facebook granted The Baltimore County Police Department’s request to deactivate her attempt at live streaming the police and counter and her later death (Weiner & Bui, 2016).^{xiii} And more so, it is perhaps why national news sites have failed to adequately cover her police-related murder.

Interestingly, police shooting Gaines’ five-year-old son did not garner significant attention or sympathy. Black children’s ages do not negate the disposability of their lives because of their color. In 2010, the killing of seven-year-old Ayanna Jones during a

Detroit Police raid, along with the 2014 murder of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, killed by Cleveland Police while playing with a toy gun in a park, both serve as evidence of the overt disposability of young Black lives in the U.S.

Furthermore, police encounters with armed whites have illustrated the ability to deescalate volatile encounters, though Gaines was not extended the same liberty. The reaches of white privilege, and the differential treatment Blacks receive become apparent when similar situations are compared by race. That is, the police murders of these armed and unarmed Black victims contrast the slow, deliberate response of authorities to violent murderers like Dylann Roof, James Holmes,^{xiv} or to the armed Oregon Bundy family militia (Ellis et al., 2015). After killing nine Black service attendees at UAME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, targeted by the killer because of their race, Roof was apprehended alive by police. Officers reportedly took Roof to Burger King, prior to booking him on charges. Further, like Korryn Gaines and Philando Castile, the militia was armed, yet remained in occupation of a federal wildlife refuge on Native American Paiute land for forty-one days. All but one of the seventeen-member group were apprehended alive and members of the militia were later acquitted of trespassing and occupation charges (Ellis et al., 2015).

Overall, the findings of this article do not seek to minimize the deaths of Black men at police hands. Neither Black adults nor Black children should suffer such violence and vulnerability. However, the silencing, disregard, or lack of attention to these killings serves to erase them from public view, and thereby make invisible the

atrocities and systemic nature of these crimes. Even when Black women died under similar conditions, and during the same time periods they were still not given similar attention to what Black men were given by news media.

On the other hand, contemporary media – particularly due to technological advances and the popularity and accessibility of social media to millions of Americans – function as dialectical spaces. Major news publications included, media serve as contestation of meanings, for critiques of the social status quo, and for unearthing systemic forms of racism and sexism. Media serve as spaces for the reinforcement of social structures, as well as for those structures' destabilization. Within these spaces occur the contestation of racial meanings and their significance (Campbell et al., 2012; Cole & Jenkins, 2012; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gamson et al., 1992; Gandy, 1996; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Haider-Markel et al., 2007; Markovitz, 2011; Meyers, 2004).

Growing access of members of the American public to social media (including Instagram and Facebook Live, SnapChat, and Twitter), and cell phones with video capability, has meant that individuals can not only capture, but share everyday microaggressions, differential, and obviously racialized treatment online. These media allow also for the unadulterated display of live streamed and videoed police violence against Blacks – as occurred with the deaths of Philando Castile, Eric Garner, and Korryn Gaines. These videos are shared with millions of users, untainted by intentional misremembering or intentionally/unintentionally falsified reports (e.g., the killing of Freddie Gray). Often

these recordings facilitate the generation of ire against, and protest of these killings (Gray et al., 2014; Hill, 2016).

The utility of such social media sites for the capture and dissemination of instances of fatal and non-fatal police violence is becoming clear. The video of Eric Garner's strangling by a New York City police officer generated ire, heavily through circulation online. The murder of Philando Castile, in front of his fiancé and four-year-old daughter, also gained attention after being livestreamed on Facebook. Similarly, Facebook confirmed terminating Korryn Gaines' Facebook Live stream of her attempted arrest, and later police murder; Baltimore County Police requested that Facebook shut down the life feed prior to storming her apartment.

Yet, despite social media serving as a democratizing force, some disseminators of national news media are still failing to adequately cover police killings of Black women. One major reason Black women's deaths are not covered appropriately in news is because Black women's suffering in the country tends to be overlooked, silenced, minimized, and disregarded. As noted by Mowatt et al., (2013), Tuchman (1996), and others, their underrepresentation is hegemonic, and symbolic of a larger lack of power within systems of marginalization in the country. That a mother was killed by police in front of her child, and that those police injured that five-year-old during the altercation, resonated less with media outlets and the American public than the fact that she brandished a weapon, and barricaded herself in her apartment against police.

In sum, the most jarring finding in this article was media disregard for police

killings of Black women. I found erasure. I found invisibility. I found silences – the lack of representation, the lack of discussion, and a lack of attention to Black women who died in connection to interactions with police under similar conditions to Black men. As shown by the rates of coverage in news, two Black women's police-related deaths generated far less media response than those of Black men or a single white woman.

Limitations & Prospects for Future Research

Among the limitations to this study were my access to available digital publications. That is, my article searches were restricted to publishers for whom I had access via the university licenses at my disposal. These licenses permitted me to restrict/define search criteria; search article publications over multiple years; and to access search results without incurring additional costs. On one hand, I was able to access and analyze trends among three highly circulating digital publications, nationally. Notwithstanding, my analysis of these three publications may fail to capture fluctuations in localized coverage in the areas where victims were killed. It is possible that Korryn Gaines in Baltimore, MD and Rekia Boyd in Chicago, IL received stronger news coverage in each of those localities than they received from national publications. Yet, it is also possible that Ramarley Graham in New York, NY, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, LA, and Justine Ruszczy in Minneapolis, MN, would have still received higher coverage in their respective locales. This would be an interesting prospect for future research.

Additionally, the analysis in this project excluded videos, blogs, and other digital

news sources that many in the U.S. employ to stay abreast of current events. However, the cause of this was the difficulty of mixing diverse types of content in searches (while excluding others), and ability to use search tools to ensure accuracy of counts. Still, comprehending rates of digital coverage for all sources of digital media could speak further to rates of news coverage – another topic that would make for promising future investigation.

Further, this manuscript excluded analysis of the actual article content (e.g., words, ideas, concepts) that was used to present Gaines and Boyd to national audiences. Another prospect for future investigations could include a qualitative content analysis of the images, concepts, and ideas used to represent victims to national audiences. Similarly, future research might also interrogate differences and similarities amongst publishers on representations of individuals killed by police violence.

Moreover, future investigations might also delve into the media treatment of Breonna Taylor, who was killed by police in 2020. Specifically, it would be interesting to compare rates of coverage, as well as subtle framing suggestions in the representations of Ms. Taylor to the public. That is, given that Ms. Taylor was killed in her home while asleep, it would be interesting to address ways publishers frame culpability and victimhood to readers – as well as to investigate the presence of controlling images of Black womanhood in news stories about her murder.

As a final prospect of future research, I propose investigations of rates of coverage, news media framing, and public responses to victims of police violence. Investigations of associations between media representations and public policy responses are already a promising area of critical media studies, and such investigations would contribute greatly to the field, and to understanding the significance of media and public responses.

Notes

ⁱ In reference to race, I intentionally capitalize “Black,” although I do not capitalize “white” throughout the article. This is done to linguistically de-center whiteness, in response to ways whiteness is centered, privileged, and made silently (and overtly) universal throughout U.S. society. Further, I use the language in this manuscript to push back against the historically consistent trend of marginalizing, minimizing, and ignoring the significance and humanity of Black people throughout the African Diaspora.

ⁱⁱ In 2012, Jordan Davis, an unarmed teenager, was murdered by a white gas station patron over an altercation regarding loud music (Alvarez, 2012). In early August 2014, Eric Garner was also killed by an illegal chokehold from a New York City police officer, stemming from a dispute over the sale of illegal cigarettes (Baker, Goodman, & Mueller, 2015). He was unarmed. That same month, a recent high school graduate, 18-year-old Michael Brown, was also killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri (Berman, 2014). He was also unarmed. Similarly, Ezell Ford was murdered by police on August 13, after an altercation with the LAPD during an “investigative stop” (Sieczkowski, 2014). The list continues. Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Ramarley Graham, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Akai Gurley, twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, killed by Chicago police while playing with a toy gun in the park (Quah & Davis, 2015).

ⁱⁱⁱ Rekia Boyd was killed by Dante Servin, an off-duty Chicago police officer. Late on the evening of March 21, 2012. Boyd was attending a social event with friends. After ordering the group Boyd was with to quiet down, Servin fired into the crowd. One of Servin’s bullets hit Boyd in the head, and she died two days later from her injuries. Over one year later, Servin was charged, and acquitted of involuntary manslaughter (Hutcherson & Burnside, 2015). Three years later, Servin was fired (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 2016). Servin, similarly, justified his actions through allegations of feeling threatened. The second subject, Korryn Gaines, was murdered in her apartment by Baltimore County Police in front of her five-year-old son. Gaines was shot, after brandishing a legal shotgun, as police executed an arrest warrant at her apartment for a traffic violation (Knezevich & Rector, 2016). Gaines was live-streaming the incident. However, Facebook Live acquiesced to requests from the Baltimore County Police to shut off the video feed, prior to their entry into Gaines’ apartment (Weiner & Bui, 2016).

^{iv} This disparity in coverage may also be because police killings of Black men are more directly connected with the longstanding trope of the Black brute. This overexaggerated stereotype played upon Black men’s supposedly “visceral” and “violent” nature, to justify raced lynching and brutality against Black men as means of social control in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Bay, 2010).

^v To reference my previous example, although it receives scant attention comparably, Black women were also subject to rape and lynching as forms of racial violence in the Jim Crow south.

^{vi} These subjects were selected because Graham’s and Sterling’s deaths were publicized under similar circumstances (e.g., video streaming), and during the same years of Gaines’s and Boyd’s deaths.

^{vii} These publishers were selected due to the availability of resources. These sites permitted the use of their own search engines, along with multiple other sources, including Google News, University of Maryland, and Michigan State University ProQuest Databases to confirm publication rates.

^{vii} These dates were selected to allow for at least two years between death of the most recent victim of police violence included in the sample (Justine Ruszczyk/Damond), and the end date for data collection. This was done to secure an adequate sample for all individuals included in the sample. Additionally, the dates provide a window into media representations of Black women victims of police violence prior to the end of the racially turbulent Trump U.S. presidential administration.

^{ix} Quite recently, in March 2020, police in Louisville, Kentucky murdered emergency medical technician, Breonna Taylor, after executing a no-knock warrant on the wrong address. Ms. Taylor was killed by police as she slept in her home.

^x In May 2015, The African American Policy Forum released a report entitled "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women", which outlined the goals and objectives of the SayHerName movement.

^{xi} Further, the murder of Janese Talton-Jackson – a young Black mother killed for refusing a Black male suitor – provides one example of the particular ways gendered oppression, marginalization, and violence may influence their lives. In general, although Black men might be vulnerable to racial marginalization as Black people, the sense of entitlement her murderer felt to Jackson's body existed because Jackson was a Black *woman* in a patriarchal society (Young 2016).

^{xii} The untimely, publicized police murders of unarmed Black victims such as Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice parallel the slow, deliberate response of authorities to a White Oregon militia in January 2016. Unlike each of the aforementioned individuals, the militia was armed, and remained in occupation of a federal wildlife refuge on Native American Paiute land for forty-one days. All but one member of the armed group was apprehended alive (Urquhart 2016).

^{xiii} For further information, please see the following *Washington Post* article. Weiner, R., & Bui, L. (2016, August 2). Korryn Gaines, killed by police in standoff, posted parts of encounter on social media. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/maryland-woman-shot-by-police-in-standoff-posted-part-of-encounter-on-social-media/2016/08/02/d4650ee6-58cc-11e6-831d-0324760ca856_story.html

^{xiv} In 2012, Holmes killed twelve people in an Aurora, Colorado theater. He was also apprehended alive by police.

References:

- Alvarez, L. (2012, December 14). Murder charges upgraded in Florida killing of youth (Published 2012). *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/15/us/charges-stepped-up-in-florida-killing-of-youth.html>
- Baker, A., Goodman, J. D., & Mueller, B. (2015, June 13). Beyond the chokehold: The path to Eric Garner's death. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html>
- Bay, M. (2010). *To tell the truth freely: The life of Ida B. Wells* (1st edition). Hill and Wang.
- Berman, M. (2014, August 11). What you need to know about the death of an unarmed Black teenager in Missouri. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/08/11/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-death-of-an-unarmed-black-teenager-in-missouri/>
- Chicago Sun-Times*. (2016, February 17). Editorial: Slow-walking justice for Rekia Boyd.
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/2016/2/17/18460571/editorial-slow-walking-justice-for-reakia-boyd>
- Cole, H. J., & Jenkins, C. D. (2012). 'Nappy headed hos': Media framing, blame shifting and the controversy over Don Imus' pejorative language. In C. P. Campbell, K. M. LeDuff, C. D. Jenkins, & R. A. Brown (Eds.), *Race and news: Critical perspectives* (pp. 3–21). Routledge.
- Campbell, C. P., LeDuff, K. M., & Brown, R. A. (2012). "Yes we did?: Race, myth and the news revisited. In C. P. Campbell, K. M. LeDuff, C. D. Jenkins, & R. A. Brown (Eds.), *Race and news: Critical perspectives* (pp. 177–198). Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2008). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (1st edition). Routledge.
- Combahee River Collective. (1995). A Black feminist statement. In B. G. Sheftall (Ed.), *Words of fire: An anthology of African American feminist thought* (pp. 232–241). The New Press.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1300.
- Crenshaw, K. W. & Ritchie, A. J. (2015). *Say her name: Resisting police brutality against Black women* (pp. 1–43). African American Policy Forum. Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies. <http://aapf.org/sayhernamereport>

- Davis, J. L., & Gandy, O. H. (1999). Racial identity and media orientation: Exploring the nature of constraint. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29(3), 367–397.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002193479902900303>
- Ellis, R., Botelho, G., & Payne, E. (2015, June 19). Charleston shooting suspect appears in court. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/06/19/us/charleston-church-shooting-main/index.html>
- Entman, R. M., & Rojecki, A. (2004). *The Black image in the white mind: Media and race in America*. Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Feagin, J. R. (2013). *The white racial frame* (2nd edition). Routledge.
- Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/229213>
- Gamson, W. A., Croteau, D., Hoynes, W., & Sasson, T. (1992). Media images and the social construction of reality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18(1), 373–393.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.18.080192.002105>
- Gandy, Jr., O. H. (1996). If it weren't for bad luck: Framing stories of racially comparative risk. In V. T. Berry & C. L. Manning-Miller (Eds.), *Mediated messages and African-American culture: Contemporary issues* (pp. 55–75). Sage Publications.
- Gray, K. A., Wypijewski, J., & Clair, J. S. (Eds.). (2014). *Killing Trayvons: An anthology of American violence* (Illustrated edition). Counterpunch.
- Gross, K., & D'Ambrosio, L. (2004). Framing emotional response. *Political Psychology*, 25(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00354.x>
- Haider-Markel, D. P., Delehanty, W., & Beverlin, M. (2007). Media framing and racial attitudes in the aftermath of Katrina. *Policy Studies Journal*, 35(4), 587–605.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2007.00238.x>
- Harris, T. W. (2015). *The sisters are alright: Changing the broken narrative of Black women in America* (1st edition). Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Harris-Perry, M. V. (2013). *Sister citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and Black women in America* (Illustrated edition). Yale University Press.
- Hill, M. L. (2017). *Nobody: Casualties of America's war on the vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and beyond* (Reprint edition). Atria Books.
- Hill Collins, P. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, 33(6), 14–32.

- Hutcherson, K., & Burnside, T. (2015, November 24). Chicago's top cop: Servin should be fired in Boyd death. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/11/24/us/rekia-boyd-shooting/>
- Jiwani, Y. (2006). *Discourses of denial: Mediations of race, gender, and violence* (Annotated edition). UBC Press.
- Jiwani, Y., & Young, M. (2006). "Missing and murdered women: Reproducing marginality in news discourse." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31(4): 895-917.
- Knezevich, A., & Rector, K. (2016, November 5). Investigative files provide new insights into Korryn Gaines' 6-hour standoff with Baltimore County police. *The Baltimore Sun*. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/investigations/bs-md-co-korryn-gaines-timeline-20161103-story.html>
- Lazar, M. (Ed.). (2005). *Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lorde, A. (2007). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches* (Reprint edition). Crossing Press.
- Markovitz, J. (2011). *Racial spectacles: Explorations in media, race, and justice* (1st edition). Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468077042000309937>
- Meyers, M. (2004). African American women and violence: Gender, race, and class in the news. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21(2), 95–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393180410001688029>
- Mowatt, R. A., French, B. H., & Malebranche, D. A. (2013). Black/Female/Body *hypervisibility* and *invisibility*: A Black feminist augmentation of feminist leisure research. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 45(5), 644–660. <https://doi.org/10.18666/jlr-2013-v45-i5-4367>
- Neely, C. L. (2015). *You're dead—So what?: Media, police, and the invisibility of Black women as victims of homicide* (1st edition). Michigan State University Press.
- Quah, N., & Davis, L. E. (2015, May 1). Here's a timeline of unarmed Black people killed by police over past year. *BuzzFeed News*. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/nicholasquah/heres-a-timeline-of-unarmed-black-men-killed-by-police-over>
- Reid-Brinkley, S. R. (2012). Ghetto kids gone good: Race, representation, and authority in the scripting of inner-City youths in the Urban Debate League. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 49(2), 77–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2012.11821781>

- Semmes, C. E. (1995). *Cultural hegemony and African American development*. Praeger.
- Sieczkowski, C. (2014, August 13). LAPD shoots, kills Black man during “investigative stop.” *The Huffington Post*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/lapd-shoot-kill-ezell-ford_n_5674679
- Spillers, H. (1984). Interstices: A small drama of words. In C. S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 73–100). Routledge.
- Taylor, K.-Y. (2016). *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black liberation* (1st edition). Haymarket Books.
- Temple, C. N. (2010). Communicating race and culture in the twenty-first century: Discourse and the post-racial/post-cultural challenge. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 5(1), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447141003602288>
- Tillet, S. (2015, August 7). Female visibility matters. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/07/magazine/female-visibility-matters.html>
- Tuchman, G. (1996). Women’s depiction by mass media. In H. Baehr & A. Gray (Eds.), *Turning it on: A reader in women & media* (pp. 11–16). Arnold.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1991). *Racism and the press*. Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. SAGE Publications.
- Van Dijk, T. A. 2000. “New(s) discourse racism: Analytical approach.” *Ethnic Minorities and the Media*: 33–49.
- Weiner, R., & Bui, L. (2016, August 2). Korryn Gaines, killed by police in standoff, posted parts of encounter on social media. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/maryland-woman-shot-by-police-in-standoff-posted-part-of-encounter-on-social-media/2016/08/02/d4650ee6-58cc-11e6-831d-0324760ca856_story.html

Table 1*Online News Coverage of Black Women Killed by Police*

	Rekia Boyd	Korryn Gaines	Total Article Coverage of Black Women
Date of Death	21-Mar-12	1-Aug-16	
News Date Coverage End	29-Jul-19	29-Jul-19	
<i>CNN</i>	6	7	13
<i>The New York Times Brand</i>	24	7	31
<i>Fox News Digital Network</i>	7	16	23
Total Number of Articles Published	37 Boyd	30 Gaines	67 Boyd & Gaines

Table 2*Online News Coverage of Black Men Killed by Police*

	Ramarley Graham	Alton Sterling	Total Article Coverage of Black Men
Date of Death	2-Feb-12	5-Jul-16	
News Date Coverage End	29-Jul-19	29-Jul-19	
<i>CNN</i>	5	198	203
<i>The New York Times Brand</i>	63	192	255
<i>Fox News Digital Network</i>	30	293	323
Total Number of Articles Published	98 Graham	683 Sterling	781 Graham & Sterling

Table 3:
Online News Coverage of Black White Women Killed by Police

Justine Ruszczyk/Damond		Total Article Coverage of White Woman
Date of Death	17-Jul-17	
News Date Coverage End	29-Jul-19	
<i>CNN</i>	42	42
<i>The New York Times Brand</i>	40	40
<i>Fox News Digital Network</i>	133	133
Total Number of Articles Published	215	