

**“She deserves that right, like any other White woman would”:
Critical Discourse Analysis on News Coverage of Missing Women
on CNN**



Sanni Junttola
Master's thesis
English
Language and Literature
Faculty of Humanities
University of Oulu
Spring 2022

Abstract

Missing White Woman Syndrome is an intersectional theory and a name coined for the prevalent racial and gender bias in the mass media news coverage of missing persons cases. It defines the media's concentration on missing persons cases of White women who are young, conventionally attractive and often from wealthier backgrounds while disregarding the disappearances of non-White women as well as men. Previous research of the topic has shown the disparity in the amount of news coverage and also studied if the phenomenon is manifested in the language and content of the news coverage. However, more empirical research on the latter is needed in order to understand how the multifaceted phenomenon is represented in the news coverage. Therefore, this thesis examines if and how the news coverage of White and non-White women differ in terms of themes, language and imagery. More specifically, the analysis answers the research question of how the missing person is depicted and if the depiction is influenced by the race, social status, age, and appearance of the missing person as well as how the need for public attention of the case is manifested in the news articles.

Critical Discourse Analysis is used as an approach to this study, as it aids in the examination of how the societal issue of Missing White Woman Syndrome is manifested in the analyzed news articles. In addition, Multimodal Discourse analysis is used as an additional approach to evaluate also the visual elements of the news articles. Based on the analytical framework an analysis will be conducted on eight news articles collected from the website of the Caple News Network, CNN which focus on the disappearances of Gabby Petito, Jashyah Moore, Miya Marcano, and Mary Johnson. After the analysis, the thesis will discuss the results before moving to the final conclusion.

The results of the study suggest that the disappearances of White women are not sensationalized only in the amount of news coverage, but also in the themes, language and imagery. An example of such news coverage was the case of Petito in which this was represented through theatrical presentation and emphasis on the dramatic aspects of the case. Such representation was not seen to the same extent of the news coverage of the cases of Moore, Marcano and Johnson. The results also support the previous research which has claimed that in order for a disappearance of a non-White woman to be seen as 'newsworthy', the positive characteristics of the person need to be emphasized. Furthermore, in the news coverage of the cases Moore and Johnson, additional discussion on the societal issue of Missing White Woman Syndrome was included to increase the newsworthiness of the stories.

Tiivistelmä

Kadonneen Valkoisen Naisen Syndrooma on intersektionaalinen teoria, jolla kuvataan vallitsevaa eroavaisuutta rodullisten vähemmistöjen sekä eri sukupuolta edustavien henkilöiden katoamistapausten uutisoinnissa. Länsimainen valtamedia perinteisesti keskittyy nuorten, kauniiden ja tyyppillisesti ylemmästä sosiaaliluokasta olevien valkoisten naisten katoamistapauksiin ottamatta huomioon muita rotuja edustavien naisten ja miesten katoamistapauksia. Aikaisemmat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet eroavaisuuden ilmenemisen uutisoinnin määrässä sekä laadussa, mutta etenkin laadullista tutkimusta tarvitaan lisää ilmiön ilmentymisen ja esiintymisen tunnistamiseksi ja ymmärtämiseksi. Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma pyrkii arvioimaan, jos ja miten valkoisten ja muita rotuja edustavien naisten katoamistapausten uutisointi eroaa toisistaan sisällöllisesti, keskittyen uutisten teemalliseen, kielelliseen sekä kuvalliseen sisältöön. Tutkimuksen tavoite on siis vastata tutkimuskysymykseen siitä, kuinka kadonnut ihminen kuvataan uutisartikkeleissa ja vaikuttaako tähän kuvaukseen henkilön rotu, sosiaalinen status, ikä tai ulkonäkö sekä miten tapauksen julkisen huomion tarve ilmaistaan uutisartikkeleissa.

Tutkimuksessa käytetään analyttisenä viitekehyksenä kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä, joka auttaa tutkimusta määrittelemään miten Kadonneen Valkoisen Naisen Syndrooma esiintyy analysoiduissa uutisartikkeleissa. Kriittisen diskurssianalyysin lisäksi viitekehyksenä käytetään multimodaalista diskurssianalyysiä, jotta uutisartikkeleiden sisältämiä kuvia ja videoita ja niiden suhdetta tekstiin voidaan analysoida. Analyysi toteutetaan analyttisen viitekehyksen pohjalta ja siinä tutkitaan kahdeksaa *Caple News Network*, *CNN* uutisverkoston julkaisemaa uutisartikkelia, jotka keskittyvät Gabby Petiton, Jashyah Mooren, Miya Marcanon sekä Mary Johnsonin katoamistapauksiin. Tutkimuksen tulokset käydään läpi omassa osiossaan ennen tutkimuksen loppupäätelmää.

Tutkimuksen tulokset viittaavat siihen, että valkoisten naisten katoamistapauksista ei tehdä sensaatiota vain uutisten määrällä vaan siihen vaikutetaan myös uutisartikkeleiden sisällön teemoilla, kielellä ja kuvituksella. Tämä käy ilmi myös analyysissa Gabby Petiton katoamistapausten uutisoinnissa, jossa tapaus esitettiin teatraalisesti ja tapauksen dramaattisuutta korostettiin. Samanlaista teatraalisuutta ei havaittu samassa määrin Mooren, Marcanon ja Johnsonin katoamistapausten uutisoinnissa. Tutkimukset tukevat myös aikaisempien tutkimusten tuloksia, joissa on todettu, että ei-valkoisen kadonneen ihmisen positiivisia ominaisuuksia korostetaan, jotta katoamistapausten uutisarvon lisäämiseksi. Mooren ja Johnsonin katoamistapausten uutisoinnin yhteydessä myös käsiteltiin Kadonneen Valkoisen Naisen Syndroomaa, joka ajankohtaisuudellaan kasvattaa uutisarvoa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Missing White Woman Syndrome.....	6
2.1 Previous research on Missing White Woman Syndrome.....	7
2.2. Causes for Missing White Woman Syndrome.....	10
3. Research material and analytical framework.....	13
3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis.....	14
4. Analysis.....	16
4.1 Description of data and overall news coverage.....	16
4.2 Race, appearance, age, and social status – how is the missing person depicted.....	20
4.3 Emotional appeals and damsels in distress – how is need for public attention manifested.....	34
4.3.1 “Finding this girl is what matters” – the case of Petito.....	36
4.3.2 “She did not run away. She was abducted” – the case of Moore.....	40
4.3.3 “I want to reiterate, Miya is still missing” – the case of Marcano.....	43
4.3.4 “She is not normally gone that long” – the case of Johnson.....	45
5. Discussion of results.....	49
6. Conclusion.....	57
References.....	60
Primary sources.....	60
Secondary sources.....	61

1. Introduction

During the year 2021, missing person cases of Gabby Petito in the United States and Sarah Everard in the United Kingdom sparked the public's interest worldwide. Media outlets covered the developments of the investigations and their aftermaths for months. First, in March of 2021, Everard, who was a 33-year-old marketing executive, went missing on her way home in Clapham, an affluent part of South London. Her disappearance and murder initiated an outpouring of outrage in the media, especially after it was published that a policeman was suspected of murdering Everard. Newspapers and tabloids worldwide were publishing articles about her disappearance and murder, and the case began a social media movement of highlighting the dangers women face in their day-to-day life, as a result of which women worldwide began sharing publicly their own experiences. Additionally, despite the coronavirus restrictions and warnings from the police, Everard's public vigil turned into a large anti-violence rally and, quite paradoxically, a confrontation with the police in South London. Six months later, in the United States, the disappearance of Gabby Petito began a similar media frenzy, as the public were following the developments of the investigation of her disappearance on *Twitter* and other social media platforms and media outlets in the United States and abroad published articles after articles regarding her disappearance. 22-year-old Gabby Petito, an aspiring social media influencer, was on a cross-country trip with her boyfriend, Brian Laundrie, when she went missing. Later the investigation found that she was a victim of homicide committed by her boyfriend. Although the case did not spark a similar social media movement as Everard's case did, the discussion on social media was constant. Especially the police were criticized on how they handled a possible domestic assault situation with Petito and Laundrie prior to Petito's disappearance.

Other similar cases many have heard of are the disappearances of Madeleine McCann, Elizabeth Smart, Laci Peterson, and Natalee Holloway. All of the cases are different in that the missing persons are of varying ages and some of them were found alive, some dead, and other's disappearances are still being investigated years later. However, they are all similar in that they garnered media attention; all of the cases were, and some still are, highly sensationalized in the media, and people worldwide were following the search efforts and aftermaths of their disappearances. There is also another similarity between all the cases: the missing persons are all White women and girls. While the discussions such as violence against women and the ability of the police to evaluate and act on domestic assault situations is very important, and Everard and Petito, like all other missing persons, deserve the media attention and uproar their disappearances and murders have caused, their

sensationalized disappearances have again brought to the surface the discussion of racial, gender, and social disparity in the coverage of missing persons cases.

The role of media in spreading information on missing persons cases is undeniable. When missing persons case receives media attention, the information spreads fast which can generate leads from the public as well as public pressure towards the authorities to solve the case. Therefore, there are many guidelines available, produced by many different organizations (e.g. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children; Canadian Centre for Information on missing Adults), for investigating agencies and families of the missing persons which explain the importance of media coverage as well as provide guidelines in dealing with the media. An example of the importance of media attention of missing persons cases and homicides is the case of Alissa Turney, who disappeared in Phoenix, 2001. She is believed to have been murdered by her stepfather Michael Turney, but for years her case remained unsolved and did not go to trial even though the police strongly suspected her stepfather. Now, 20 years later, Michael Turney has been arrested on suspicion of her murder due to a social media campaign carried out by Sarah Turney, Alissa Turney's sister, who shared details of the case actively on different social media platforms such as *TikTok* and *Instagram* as well as in a podcast which all received massive amounts of attention from the public (Fortin, 2020, Aug 28).

McCoy (2001) and Robinson (2006) both suggested that the Internet may change the news landscape and standards to which traditional news organizations are held (Liebler, 2010, p. 553). This seems since to have been shown to be correct at least when it comes to the news coverage of missing persons cases. The discussion of racial and gender bias in news coverage of missing persons cases in the United States began during the first years of the 21st century as many bloggers and commenters argued that there is such bias present in the way the mainstream media distributes attention to different missing persons cases and that many aspects affect the amount of news coverage, such as individual's age, social class, and attractiveness (Sommers, 2016, p. 278). The phenomenon has been given the name *Missing White Woman Syndrome* (MWWS) and is also sometimes called *Missing Pretty Girl Syndrome* and *Damsel in Distress Syndrome*, due to women and especially White women receiving most of the media attention when it comes to missing persons cases (Sommers, 2016, p. 278; Moss, 2019, p. 741). The public discussion of the phenomenon was brought to the United States national spotlight in 2005, when Natalee Holloway, an 18-year-old young, blond, White woman from Alabama disappeared during her High School Senior trip in Aruba. Right away the mainstream media and the public were interested in her story. Two months later, Latoyia Figueroa, a 24-year-old woman of Hispanic and African American descent went missing in Philadelphia and while Holloway's name

was in the mainstream media the same day she went missing, Figueroa's disappearance did not gain public attention until a group of bloggers started working together in order to spread the word of her disappearance (Liebler, 2010, pp. 549-550; Stillman, 2007, p. 497). However, it is not the only example of White women getting media attention while disappearances of women representing other races go unnoticed. For example, after the cases of Sarah Everard and Gabby Petito were covered worldwide, people started increasingly demanding attention to other disappearances, and different media outlets began publishing articles regarding the MWWS.

After the discussion began in traditional and online media in the beginning of the 21st century it also caught the attention of scholars, who have now established that there is a racial and gender disparity in the amount of news coverage a missing person receives (e.g. Sommers, 2016; Simmons & Woods, 2015). Although previous research has proven the existence of MWWS, the research is still rather lacking. The studies have mainly focused on the amount of media attention based on gender and race, and even though some scholars have discussed and examined the phenomenon from many different viewpoints, such as the legal measures which contribute to the lack of search and recovery of missing Black girls and Women, media activism, and media self-critique, more empirical research is needed in order to understand the multifaceted phenomenon (Moss, 2016; Stillman, 2007; Liebler, 2010). Researching the concept of Missing White Woman Syndrome is important so that we will be able to recognize patterns of racial and social inequality in our society and to understand how it is manifested in the mainstream media.

Although MWWS has been a topic of conversation in the media and scholarly literature for over twenty years, especially in the United States, the recent discussion regarding the cases of Everard and Petito suggests that still the cases of attractive, White women with favorable social statuses are more widely accepted as victims and their missing persons and homicide cases are used as representing the violence faced by women. Therefore, I was inspired to focus this study on the sensationalism of missing persons cases of White women in the mainstream media. Additionally, as prior research comparing the news coverage of missing persons cases of White women with those of women of color has mostly focused on the amount of news coverage received, my interest lies in examining if MWWS is manifested in the content, meaning the language, themes, and imagery, of the news articles. This thesis will concentrate on the news coverage of missing persons cases in the United States, more specifically the news coverage on *CNN*, as it is one of the major national news networks. However, it is important to note that as the case of Everard suggests, the phenomenon is widespread in Western society despite the discussion and scholarly literature often being United States centered.

The aim of this study is to examine if and how the news coverage of White and non-White women differ in terms of themes, language and imagery. The study will focus on *CNN* news coverage of the case of Gabby Petito, a White woman, and to compare it to those of Jashyah Moore, a Black girl, Miya Marcano, a Black woman, and Mary Johnson, an Indigenous woman. From each case, two online news articles will be analyzed. In other words, the analysis will seek to answer the research question of how the missing person is depicted and if the depiction is influenced by the race, social status, age, and appearance of the missing person and how the need for public attention of the case is manifested in the news articles.

The analytical framework of the study relies on Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis which helps the study to approach and accurately examine the content of the news articles as representation of the society in which they were created. The analytical framework and the research material will be discussed further in section 3, before which section 2 introduces the concept of Missing White Woman Syndrome, previous studies conducted of the phenomenon, and discusses the causes of the multifaceted phenomenon. After introducing the concept of MWWS and analytical framework, section 4 will focus on the analysis in which all the news articles chosen for analysis will be thoroughly examined with the help of a specific set of questions formulated based on the methodological principles of Critical Discourse Analysis in order to answer the presented research questions. The results of the analysis will be discussed more specifically in section 5 from which the study will move onto its conclusion in section 6.

2. Missing White Woman Syndrome

The term *Missing White Woman Syndrome* was first introduced in 2004 by PBS news anchor, Gwen Ifill. It defines the media's concentration on missing persons cases of White women, who are usually young, conventionally attractive, and from wealthier backgrounds, while disregarding many disappearances of women of other races as well as men (Moss, 2019, p. 741). It has been described as "round-the-clock coverage of disappeared young females who qualify as 'damsels in distress' by race, and other relevant social variables" (Moss, 2019, p. 741). The phenomenon became more known during the previously mentioned media crisis surrounding the case of Natalee Holloway, a White woman, as a group of bloggers began advocating for national media attention for LaToyia Figueroa, a person of Hispanic and African American origins (Stillman, 2007, p. 497). The group of bloggers utilized mainstream media's tactic of scandalizing missing persons' cases of white women by narrating her story in theatrical detail, and a number of citizen journalists shared her story and gave her family an opportunity to share their grief and advocate for Figueroa's case. With this campaign they were able to gather a \$100,000-dollar reward and make her case more widely known (Stillman, 2007, p. 497).

Furthermore, in February 2005, 9-year-old White-girl Jessica Lunsford disappeared from her bedroom in Homosassa, Florida and within days, her disappearance began a national media crisis in the United States with celebrity donors offering \$110,000 reward for information leading to her safe return and 540 volunteers joining law enforcement officers in search efforts (Stillman, 2007, p. 493). During the scouring of the area, a body of a young girl was found in a lake near where Lunsford disappeared. Soon after the headlines declared: 'Police confirm body found not Jessica's' and 'Body found in lake is not missing [Florida] girl' and in a televised press conference Sheriff Jeff Dawsey stated: 'We have confirmed it is not our girl. I repeat, it is *not* our girl. And for that, we are very happy.' The identity of the girl found in the lake remained a mystery for the public, she was not named, and it did not seem like anyone cared for her identity, other than 'she's not Jessica.' This raises a question, why is someone else more worthy of being named and worthy of public empathy, but one is not; why is one 'not Jessica' and other 'our girl'.

It is important to note that despite being referred to as *Missing White Woman syndrome* when discussing the media coverage of missing persons cases, the phenomenon is much more extensive. Same lack of media representation of non-White females can be seen in many aspects of the mainstream media, such as news coverage of homicides. In fact, overall crimes against Black women

are underrepresented in the media, even though they are more likely to be victims of homicide compared to White women (Neely, 2015, p. 9). The lack of media representation is harmful in many ways, but especially in that it creates a false sense of security for women of color, even though they are more likely victims. In a study conducted in New York City, researchers interviewed Black and Latina women living in the city, and the study shows that they falsely believed White women to be more likely victims of homicides based on continuous media coverage of White female victims. In the same study, the women interviewed viewed White women as ‘ideal’ victims; more submissive, weaker, and unable to protect themselves from crime (Neely, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, it is important to study the news coverage of missing persons cases and homicides because it enhances stereotypes and could possibly distort one’s understanding of the society. Further, the study showed that women of color believed that in order for them to be recognized as ‘worthy’ of media coverage, there is a need to demonstrate that they are better than the perceived stereotypes of their racial group, for example that they were good mothers, students, or religious (Neely, 2015, p. 9).

These differences in the representation and justification of victimhood are problematic, indicating that someone has to be proven as worthy of empathy and representation, while someone has it as a default due to race and gender. In order to understand and explain the racial and gender bias in society, we must look how the representation of different races and genders differs in mainstream media. As stated, the problem is not just the lack of media attention and representation for minorities. The attitudes are deep-rooted in Western society, relating to racism and minorities being seen as ‘the other’, meaning that some individuals and groups are defined and labeled as not fitting within the norms of the society (Bonilla-Silva, 2011; Liebler, 2007, p. 551). I will discuss these aspects more extensively in the subsection 2.2.

2.1 Previous research on Missing White Woman Syndrome

Previous research has shown the racial and gender disparities in the amount of news coverage given to missing persons cases in the United States. Min and Feaster (2010) studied how this disparity is seen when comparing the evening newscasts of major national broadcasters *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, *CNN* and *FOX News* between the years 2005 and 2007 with the National Crime Information Center of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) dataset of missing children. More specifically, they wanted to study whether African American missing children’s cases are underrepresented, if female missing children are overrepresented, and if there is any relationship between the coverage of race and gender

group as well as the types of covered missing children cases. The different types of cases are kidnapping, death and general missing cases (Min & Feaster, 2010, pp. 209-210).

Min and Feaster (2010) conclude that the results do suggest that missing children's cases are disproportionately broadcasted based on race and gender, and that especially African American children were underrepresented compared to Non-African Americans (p. 213). Interestingly, contrary to previous belief, their study also suggests that when comparing the proportion of female children reported missing to the amount of news coverage in the evening newscast, they are also significantly underrepresented when comparing to the actual rate of incidents, and missing male children were overrepresented (2010, p. 213). However, when they compared the results to discover if there is any relationship between the coverage of race and gender groups and the type of the missing children case, they found that kidnapping cases of non-African American girls and the deaths of African American boys were covered in a greater rate than expected (2010, p. 213).

While discussing the results from Min and Feaster (2010), Simmons and Woods (2015) stated that their findings of female children not being overrepresented contradicts previous commentary of media's supposed preoccupation with 'damsels in distress' (p. 240). However, it should be considered that the overrepresentation of kidnapping cases of non-African American girls may suggest that they are in fact seen as damsels in distress, as they are more often presented in the position of a victim. Furthermore, researchers have found that especially in the news coverage of abduction cases in the United States, there is a particular bias favoring the cases of young white females, as between 2000 and 2005, 76% of child abductions covered on *CNN* News were white, even though only 53% of abductees are white, and according to Stillman (2007), most prominent cases featured conventionally attractive females (p. 492). This raises an important question of whether news media is more willing to portray non-African American girls as victims and if the underrepresentation of missing female children in news coverage found in Min and Feaster (2010) as well as Simmons and Woods' (2015) studies contradicts the claim of media's preoccupation with damsel's in distress or if the trope of 'damsel in distress' requires more qualifications than just being a female, such race, appearance, and social status.

In addition to the news coverage of missing children, the amount of media attention received by individuals of any age has been studied. For example, Sommers (2016) studies how the amount of media coverage is distributed to missing individuals of different races and genders, taking into account also the intensity level of the coverage, meaning that multiple articles about the same person

were combined into one data point. The dataset for the study was gathered from national news outlet *CNN* and three major news outlets in large cities which are *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (p. 291). This study also compares the numbers of news coverage to the date from FBI National Crime Information Center. Based on the study, Sommers (2016) states that as a whole, the results provide significant support for the prevalence of Missing White Woman Syndrome (p. 309). According to his study, when looking at the coverage intensity as well as the amount of coverage, Blacks are significantly underrepresented in the amount of media attention their missing persons cases receive and female missing persons are overrepresented (2016, p. 309). Furthermore, Sommer states that the results of intersectional comparisons which take into account both gender and race, are speculative, but do suggest support to the existence of MWWS (2016, p. 310).

Although there is proof that the gender and racial disparity is present in the amount of media attention a missing person receives, the topic must be studied more extensively. It seems that there is not a lot of research on the other aspects of MWWS, meaning the perceived social status and attractiveness of the missing person (cf. Liebler, 2010; Slakoff & Fradella, 2019). Furthermore, the research has previously focused on the amount of media coverage a missing person receives, and although there are studies discussing the gender and racial bias in the used language and the themes highlighted in news articles, more empirical research is needed. Additionally, previous research has focused heavily on missing persons cases and the media coverage in the United States, but similar type of research has not been conducted regarding many other countries.

However, it is clear that the phenomenon is common not just in the United States. In Canada, there has been a lot of discussion on the violence against aboriginal women and girls, a problem which for many years was ignored. According to The Ontario Native Women's Association, Indigenous people are six times more likely to be victimized than any other women in Canada (Riel-Johns, 2016, p. 35). Riel-Johns (2016) argues that the racialized and sexualized violence against Indigenous women is result of patriarchal values pushing out Indigenous peoples' matriarchal values, discrimination in legislated policies that target Indigenous women, and due to Indigenous women being sexualized by men since settler contact (p. 35-39). Riel-Johns (2016) states that the violence towards Indigenous women in Canada is a systematic issue, which results in alarming rates of missing and murdered Indigenous Women and notes the media silence regarding the issue which has only recently become publicly known due to advocacy (p. 35). Thus, it is clear that the society's negligent attitude towards the problem was reflected in the amount of news coverage. The issue, named *Missing and Murdered*

Indigenous Women (MMWI) is complex and broad, and thus it cannot be discussed further in this study, but it is important to note that the issues discussed are more far-reaching than media coverage of missing persons cases in the United States.

Furthermore, it seems that the same media bias is present in the British media. The name of Madeleine McCann, a British girl who disappeared while on vacation in Portugal with her family in 2007, is often referred to when discussing MWWS, but there is not a lot of research considering the overrepresentation of missing white women and girls in UK. However, the case of Madeleine McCann which is still in the news all over the world, and the recent media crisis and discussion regarding the case of Sarah Everard suggest that similar disparities are common in Western societies, not only in the United States. Although there are not a lot of academic studies conducted about the topic in the United Kingdom, it has been discussed in the British press. When discussing the case of Madeleine McCann and comparing it to many names of non-White children, names that many have not ever heard of, an online news article published in *The Independent* states that “The simple fact is that one single white child’s story can dominate news coverage for years while few in the public domain are aware of how many children of colour are victimised, missing or murdered” (Suleyman, 2016, Apr 26). Additionally, similar critique against media coverage of violence against women has been discussed in Britain regarding the violence against sex workers. The media sensationalizes certain aspects of serial killings of sex workers, which of course brings media attention to the cases. However, the sensationalizing is done in such way that the women are dehumanized and hypersexualized, while their deaths are depicted as one-dimensional rather than the woman having complex and nuanced lives (Stillman, 2007, p. 492). However, to my best knowledge on the conducted research of the phenomenon, more research is needed in order to define how it is manifested in the press of Western society, and how and if it varies between the media of different countries.

2.2. Causes for Missing White Woman Syndrome

As stated before, Missing White Woman Syndrome is a multifaceted phenomenon. In order to fully understand it, the possible explanations to the causes of the racial, gender, as well as social disparity in the news media coverage of missing persons cases must be discussed. According to Liebler (2010), MWWS is a symptom of news media practices which have for years constructed people of color as “the other” and it has been argued that minorities are typically been framed in the media as stereotypes, social problems, and invisible (p. 551). Similar findings have been suggested by scholars when it comes to social class. Coverage has been shown to emphasize for example the working-class

background of a missing individual and in Canada, missing and murdered women are marginalized in news coverage due to their sex worker status and Aboriginality (Liebler, 2010, p. 551). Min and Feaster (2010) state that any possibly existing racial bias in news coverage does not tell necessarily of overt racism but may be caused by the specific ways of the culture of news organizations (p. 209). Although diversity among journalists has increased, majority of them are still white, which might play into the “White bias” in the news coverage (2010, p. 209). Additionally, many argue that as commercial news firms are driven by profit, they focus on presenting dramatic stories featuring white victims, as white people are the majority audience group (2010, p. 209).

This connects to Bonilla-Silva’s (2011) theory of racial grammar, which is present in many aspects of the society according to him. Bonilla-Silva (2011) argues that “racial domination necessitates something like a grammar to normalize the standards of white supremacy as *the* standards for all sorts of everyday transactions rendering domination” (p. 174). Bonilla-Silva (2011) also states that as racial domination creates a grammar, it helps us to accept racial order as a norm and thus, in the case of missing persons cases, the stories about White people become universal stories representing all of us (p. 174, p. 177). This racial grammar affects People of Color deeply and prevents White people from truly empathizing with non-Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2011, p. 186). Therefore, researching MWWS is especially important. Media’s role in finding a missing person is not only to spread information, but to create feelings of empathy so that people would be more willing to provide tips to the investigators and to help the law enforcement in search efforts.

It has been argued that media is obsessed with missing children’s cases, and children are typically underrepresented in the news, but stories in which the child is in the position of a victim appear often (Min and Feaster, 2010, p. 208). It has been argued that these types of news stories are considered highly newsworthy, as crimes against children are rare and considered especially morally wrong (Min and Feaster, 2010, p. 208). In addition to children, women are generally underrepresented in the overall news coverage, and when women receive media attention, it is usually in a position of a victim: thus, many feminist scholars argue that the media is interested in vulnerability to violation, typically associated with women (Min and Feaster, 2010, p. 210). This supports the idea that MWWS exists partly due to women being seen as ‘damsels in distress.’ Furthermore, it has been established that typically in the western mainstream media, White people are usually portrayed as victims whereas minorities are often depicted as criminal offenders (Moss, 2019, p. 743). According to a 2013 FBI report, federal arrests of Black Americans are only 28,3% of the overall arrests and in 2017 U.S. Department of Justice report found that in 22,7% of overall federal cases Black Americans were

victims (2019, p. 743). Moss (2019) states that when contrasted to these numbers, it is alarming at what rate Black Americans are portrayed as criminals which indicates that racial disparity cultivates and upholds perceptions and attitudes within United States (p. 743).

Furthermore, it is not new information that the laws and policies as well as law enforcement who enforces them discriminate – intentionally and unintentionally – minorities. Moss (2019) states that the current laws and policies in the United States are either causing or mimicking the lack of media coverage of missing persons cases of non-White people in mainstream media and calls for more efforts to advocate for the coverage, investigation, and settlement of missing persons cases of Black girls and other minority victims (p. 738). The demand for attention to the cases of missing Black women and girls is high, and the resources dedicated to resolve their cases is unjustifiably low (Moss, 2019, p. 750). Additionally, the current missing persons law and legislation in the United States does not support the cases of the many missing Black girls and women. For example, the AMBER Alert laws are used disproportionately as Black children are more likely to be labeled as runaways, which is excluded by the AMBER Alert system's criteria (Moss, 2019, p. 752). Therefore, Black children being often excluded from the AMBER Alert system's criteria could affect the conveyed urgency of finding them to the media and the public resulting to possible lack of media attention.

In addition to the flaws in AMBER Alert law, similar issues are present within current state law; although the law states that police and sheriff's departments cannot establish policies that require waiting periods before accepting missing children reports, many law enforcement agencies use loopholes in the law to get around the present state laws, for example by using the term 'runaway' which might allow delays in law enforcements response regarding a missing children report (Moss, 2019, p. 752). This submits many children of color in danger, as the term runaway is understood as if the child would not be in danger. According to Moss (2019), regarding missing persons cases, the term is understood as the child not being harmed by systems of exploitation and victimizations and it removes the government's role putting the blame on the children's caregivers (p. 752). Although the child's disappearance would not have been in result of danger, the child still is in danger when not in contact and protection of their caregivers. Additionally, when the police label children as runaways, there is no certainty that the child has left due to their own will and there have been many cases where children have been found dead after not being searched for due to the runaway status. It seems that as minority children are more likely to be labeled as runaways, law enforcement treats the cases of White children more seriously.

3. Research material and analytical framework

In this thesis the research material consists of eight online news articles collected from the *CNN* website. *CNN, The Cable News Network*, was chosen as the media network to be focused on in the analysis, as it is one of the major national news sources in the United States and the articles are easily accessible online. The inspiration for the topic of research for this thesis was the public discussion on Missing White Woman Syndrome which was started by the media frenzy around Gabby Petito's case, and therefore, the focus of the thesis became to be the news coverage of Petito's missing persons case. However, as it is shown that not many cases, especially the cases of other than White women, get media attention especially as extensively as Petito did, it proved difficult to find cases which news coverage could be compared to that of Petito. The criteria for selecting the cases for analysis were that there should be existing news coverage of the case while it is labeled a missing persons investigation and that the disappearances should have happened around the same time. Additionally, my aim was to find cases of women of different races. The disappearances of Petito, Moore, and Marcano happened during the fall of 2021, and the disappearance of Johnson almost a year prior in November 2020 but was not covered on *CNN* until the fall of 2021. The missing persons cases of Jamie Moore and Mary Johnson were found and chosen for analysis while searching the name Gabby Petito on the *CNN's* website, as Petito is mentioned in the articles discussing Moore and Johnson's cases. Marcano's case was found and chosen for analysis while searching for articles covering missing persons cases on *CNN's* website. The articles chosen for analysis will be discussed more extensively in section 5.1 Description of data and overall news coverage as part of the analysis.

It should be noted that at the beginning stages of this study, it was considered if the real names of these women should be used, as the topic of missing persons cases and possible violence endured by the missing person can be a very delicate subject for the person themselves as well as their families. This was especially considered in regard to Jashyah Moore's case, as she is underage and *CNN* news articles refrained from using her name after it was discovered that she had run away from home due to her mother abusing her. However, as all of the information used in the analysis of this study is public information found online, and many of these families advocate for more attention to be brought to these cases, it was chosen to use the real names of the women. Regarding the case of Jashyah Moore, although *CNN* did not use her name in their news coverage after her being found, many other national media channels did, so this information is also easily accessible online. Additionally, the analysis will focus on those articles in which her real name was used prior to her being found.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA), also sometimes referred to as Critical Discourse Studies, is an inter-disciplinary approach to study language in use and aims to advance the understanding of how discourse reflects and influences social processes, social structures and social change (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018, p. 1). Fairclough (2010) defines the aim of CDA as to systematically analyze the opaque relationships of discursive practices, events and texts with wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes in order to investigate how these practices, events and texts emerge from and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power (p. 93). In other words, CDA is focused on analyzing especially the relationships of discrimination and dominance; how these are manifested in language but also how language influences those relationships.

Furthermore, according to Fairclough (2010), CDA views language as a social practice and considers the context of the language use as crucial, meaning that language is a mode of action which is always socially and historically situated (p. 92). Fairclough (2010) defines three characteristics of CDA to be that it is relational, dialectical, and transdisciplinary (p. 3). CDA is a *relational* form of research, as it does not primarily focus on studying entities or individuals but often complex and layered societal relations (Fairclough, 2010, p. 3). Therefore, in CDA the term *discourse* is not seen as an object which can be separated from its social, historical, and cultural context, as those contexts manifest in the discourse but also as discourse manifests in them, making CDA also *dialectical* (Fairclough, 2010, p. 4). In other words, when critically analyzing discourse, one must always consider the social, historical, and cultural context in which discourse was created to accurately evaluate how societal structures are reflected in the discourse and how a certain discourse influences social structure. Therefore, CDA does not only analyze the discourse in itself but the dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments (Fairclough, 2010, p. 4).

Consequently, when critically analyzing discourse, one can not only focus on the disciplines of linguistics, but also consider politics, history, sociology and so forth, making CDA a transdisciplinary, or as already mentioned, interdisciplinary form of analysis (Fairclough, 2010, p. 4). Based on CDA being a relational, dialectical, and transdisciplinary form of research, it helps one to study society through discourse but also to study discourse through society, as one contextualizes and seeks to understand the historical, socio-political, and cultural foundations of language in use (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018, p. 2).

This approach was selected for this study to critically analyze the news coverage of missing persons cases in order to uncover the social structures of discrimination which manifest in the discourse but also to evaluate how the possible racial disparity in the language, themes, and imagery advance those structures of discrimination. Furthermore, as the analysis will also focus on the visual aspects of the news coverage, the study will apply Multimodal Discourse Analysis (hereafter MDA) in addition to CDA. In MDA, the social interpretation of language and the meanings of it is also extended to different aspect of visual communication (Ledin & Machin, 2018, p. 61). In other words, in MDA, language is seen as abstract, not only as written or spoken words but also in visuals such as pictures, video clips and other visual effects, which are used in order to convey a message. Therefore, MDA supports the analysis of semiotic resources to evaluate the situated meaning and the ideologies and values they carry and in addition to solely focusing on the language (Ledin & Machin, 2018, p. 62).

In order to systematically analyze the research material chosen for this study with CDA and MDA as the approach, the analysis will be conducted based on a specific set of questions formulated following the methodological principles of CDA in order to examine if and how the articles differ in terms of themes, language, and imagery and if the different elements of MWWS are manifested in the content of the news articles. In forming the questions I have to some extent applied Van Dijk's (1988) tool of schematic analysis and tailored the questions to fit the purposes of this thesis based on my prior knowledge of the phenomenon and a case study conducted for my bachelor's thesis (Junttola, 2019). The questions are: 1) What is the extent of the overall news coverage of the case on *CNN*; 2) Who is speaking, how often, and what; 3) Who is spoken to; 4) How are the circumstances of the disappearance discussed; 5) How is the investigation discussed; 6) What other background is provided; 7) How is the state of being in danger described; 8) How are race, appearance, age, and social class discussed; 11) What kind of images and headlines are used.

4. Analysis

In this section, the eight articles chosen for analysis will be examined based on the set of questions presented in the previous section. The analysis will not explicitly answer every question presented, but with the help of those questions now evaluate the research questions more specifically. The analysis will follow the structure of first focusing on the data and overall news coverage and will then move to the first part of the research question of how each missing person is depicted in the articles in terms of race, social status, age, and appearance and then the second part of the research question of how is the need for public attention in each case manifested.

4.1 Description of data and overall news coverage

When searching the name Gabby Petito on *CNN*'s website, the search engine produces 103 search results (2022, Mar 8). These results include articles and videos published between September 16, 2021, and February 14, 2022, and focus on Petito's missing person, later homicide, case, as well as the aftermath of the investigation and the manhunt of her boyfriend Brian Laundrie. In addition to Petito's case, the results include news articles and videos of other cases in relation to which Petito's case had been mentioned. For the purpose of this thesis, only the two articles focusing on the missing person case itself have been chosen for analysis, in order for the articles to be as comparable to articles on other missing persons cases. Thus, articles which have been written after the case turned into a homicide investigation, and articles focusing on the beforementioned manhunt of Laundrie, have been excluded. However, it is important to note the massive amount of media attention Petito's case has overall received. The first article of Petito's case by *CNN* was published on September 16, 2021, with the headline "Gabby Petito's family makes plea for information about missing daughter." The article consists of 27 paragraphs and as typical for online news articles, the paragraphs are short, only one to three sentences long, most likely to increase readability. The article is divided into three sections with two subheadings; "Laundries 'will have no further comment,' attorney says" and "Petito and fiancé had 'altercation' in Utah" (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16). The second article chosen for analysis was published the same day, on September 16, 2021, with the headline "Police looking for missing woman Gabby Petito ask for her boyfriend's cooperation." Similar to the first article, the paragraphs are short, one to three sentences long, but the article itself is a bit longer with 38 paragraphs and is divided into four sections with headlines "Petito and boyfriend had 'altercation' in Utah, police say", "Laundrie family is 'remaining in the background'" and "Police call circumstances of disappearance 'odd'" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16).

Table 1*Analyzed articles and overall news coverage*

Case	Publication	Headline	Length in Paragraphs	Overall number of search results
Gabby Petito	09/16/2021	“Gabby Petito’s family makes plea for information about missing daughter”	27	103
	09/16/2021	“Police looking for missing woman Gabby Petito ask for her boyfriend’s cooperation”	38	
Jashyah Moore	11/05/2021	“A 14-year-old left home to go to a local deli more than 20 days ago. She hasn’t been seen since”	10	5
	11/11/2021	“\$20,000 reward offered for 14-year-old who vanished nearly a month ago”	13	
Miya Marcano	09/28/2021	“A Florida woman is missing and a man police were looking for appears to have killed himself”	14	8
	09/30/2021	“FBI joins search for Miya Marcano, who has been missing in Florida for nearly a week”	12	
Mary Johnson	09/18/2021	“FBI offers \$10,000 reward for information on the disappearance of Native American woman”	21	4
	09/23/2021	“Mary Johnson, an Indigenous woman, went missing nearly a year ago. While the FBI recently offered a reward, activists say that’s not enough”	41	

The second case chosen for analysis is the case of Jashyah Moore, who went missing in October of 2021, after walking to her local deli in New Jersey. The search of her name on the *CNN*’s website search tool provides two articles published November 5 and November 11, 2021 (2022, Mar 8). There is one additional search result with the headline “Police chief credits community effort for Jashyah Moore’s return,” which seems to have been a now unavailable video, as the link leads to *CNN.com*’s front page. As one can see, the case of Jashyah Moore did not become such a national media crisis as Gabby Petito’s case did. However, when searching the name Gabby Petito, two articles relating to Moore’s disappearance can be found. The articles are published on November 12 and November 13, 2021, and report on the developments of the investigation after Jashyah Moore was found and her mother arrested and charged with two counts of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child. The contents, and even the headline “Mother of 14-year-old girl who went missing for almost a month is arrested, officials say”, are exactly the same in both of the articles (Studley et al., 2021, Nov 12).

It is unclear why the same article is published twice on the *CNN*'s website. The reason for the articles not appearing on the search of Jashyah Moore's name is due to the articles not mentioning it, most likely due to her young age. However, other national media outlets, such as *ABC News*, *NBC News*, and *Fox News*, do mention the name in their articles discussing the later developments of the case. Additionally, the mentioned national media outlets did cover the case more extensively compared to *CNN*. For instance, *ABC News* reported eight online news articles on the case between November 5 and November 16, 2021, of which four focus on the search efforts and the developments of the investigation of finding Moore. Rest of the articles focus on Jashyah Moore being found and Jamie Moore, her mother, being charged with child endangerment after Jashyah Moore revealed that she ran away from home due to her mother abusing her. Although receiving some national media attention, the coverage of Moore's case was nowhere near the intensity and scale of *Petito*'s case.

As mentioned, *CNN* published the first article on Moore's disappearance on November 5, 2021, with the headline "A 14-year-old left home to go to a local deli more than 20 days ago. She hasn't been seen since" (Romine & Harring, 2021, Nov 5). The second article "\$20,000 reward offered for 14-year-old who vanished nearly a month ago", was published on November 11, 2021 (Studley, 2021, Nov 11). The first published article consists of 10 paragraphs and the second 13 paragraphs and in both, similarly to the articles discussing the case of *Petito*, the paragraphs are very short, 1 to 3 sentences long, most likely for readability reasons. Neither article has any subheadings, perhaps due to the shortness of the articles.

The third case analyzed in this thesis, the disappearance and suspected homicide of Miya Marcano, was covered on *CNN* in six online news articles. *CNN* also published a short video of news coverage of the case, and her case was also mentioned in an online news article in which *CNN* gathers notable events from the past week with the headline "Start your week smart: Nobel Prize... Women's March... Coronavirus... Afghanistan... Miya Marcano" (Karimi, 2021, Oct 3). Thus, overall the search of her name produced 8 search results on the *CNN* website published between September 28 and December 28, 2021. The online news articles are published between September 28 and December 28, 2021 (2022, Mar 8). Two of the articles discuss the disappearance and the search for Marcano, two articles and the video focus on her body being found and the last two articles focus on the cause of death and Marcano's family filing a wrongful death lawsuit against the apartment complex in which Marcano lived. For the purposes of this thesis, I will analyze the two articles discussing her disappearance, published before her body was found. These articles are "A Florida woman is missing and a man police were looking for appears to have killed himself," published on September 28, 2021,

and “FBI joins search for Miya Marcano, who has been missing in Florida for nearly a week,” published on September 30, 2021. The first published article is 14 paragraphs long and the second published article 12 paragraphs long. As in previous cases, the paragraphs are short, one to three sentences long. Similarly to the articles focusing on Jashyah Moore’s case, perhaps due to the shortness of the articles, they do not include any subheadings.

The last case chosen for analysis is the missing persons case of Mary Johnson Davis, which reporting is the most different out of all the cases discussed in this thesis. Firstly, while all the other cases took place during the fall of 2021, Johnson disappeared on November 25, 2020, in Oso, Washington on Tulalip reservation and was reported missing on December 9, 2020. However, her disappearance did not receive national news coverage until September of 2021, almost a year after she went missing as FBI announced a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the identification, arrest and conviction of whoever responsible (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). Secondly, the articles do not focus only on Mary Johnson’s disappearance but discuss her case while emphasizing the issue of *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women*, MMIW, which is closely related to MWWS. There are three articles and one video on the website of *CNN* which discuss the case of Mary Johnson, published between September 18 and November 26, 2021. As in the previous cases, the articles for the analysis are the first published article “FBI offers \$10,000 reward for information on the disappearance of Native American woman” and the second published article “Mary Johnson, an Indigenous woman, went missing nearly a year ago. While FBI recently offered a reward, activists say that’s not enough”, which was published on September 23, 2021. The third published article “A year after Mary Johnson’s disappearance, federal officials are finally acting on the crisis of missing Indigenous people in America,” is excluded from the analysis, as it focuses more on an executive order, signed by President Joe Biden, directing federal agencies to create a strategy to address the crisis of violence against Native Americans. Although, it must be added that also the second article heavily focuses on issues related to Johnson’s disappearance.

The first published article of Johnson’s case is 21 paragraphs long and includes two sections, the first focusing on the missing person case of Johnson and the second with the headline “a crisis of missing Native American women” and discusses the wider issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and the efforts of different agencies to tackle the issue (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). The second article is longer, with 41 paragraphs and is divided into five sections with the subheadings “Johnson’s disappearance remains unsolved,” “Authorities are often slow to act, advocates say,” “The full scale of the problem is unknown,” and “Johnson’s family hasn’t given up hope” (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23).

From these sections the first, without a subheading and seven paragraphs long, the second, “Johnson’s disappearance remains unsolved” with 14 paragraphs, and the last “Johnson’s family hasn’t given up hope” with three paragraphs, focus more directly on Johnson’s disappearance itself. As in the articles focusing on previous cases, the paragraphs in these articles are one to three sentences long. As one can see, these articles are notably a lot longer than those focusing on the cases of Moore and Marcano, the length being closer to the articles discussing the disappearance of Petito and the latter article even longer. However, as stated, the articles discussing Johnson’s case also focus on the societal issue of MMIW, whereas in the articles of Petito, only the disappearance is discussed.

When observing the overall news coverage from all four cases (Table 1) and contrasting the amount of news coverage on the case of Gabby Petito to all the other four cases, there is a distinct difference between Petito’s case and the four others. The difference, however, is not only in the overall number of search results but also in the length of the articles. The articles focusing on the cases of Petito and Johnson are much longer when compared to the articles of Moore and Marcano. However, in the articles discussing Johnson’s case, the case itself is only discussed in 10 paragraphs of the first article and 21 paragraphs of the second article whereas the articles of Gabby Petito’s case focus solely on her disappearance only. Therefore, the case of Gabby Petito is overall covered much more extensively than the cases of Jashyah Moore, Miya Marcano, and Mary Johnson.

4.2 Race, appearance, age, and social status – how is the missing person depicted

As discussed in section 2., scholars have shown and commenters claimed that the missing persons cases of White, conventionally attractive women and girls of wealthier backgrounds are more likely to receive media attention than those of non-White women and men. Therefore, in this section I will discuss how the missing person is depicted in the analyzed articles and if the missing person’s race, appearance, age, and social status are somehow manifested in the depiction.

In the case of Gabby Petito, the social status of Petito, Laundrie, and their families or anything referring to it is not directly mentioned in neither article. However, the recipient can make assumptions on their financial situation based on some of the information provided in the articles, such that Petito was able to buy a van for herself and travel in it around the United States with Laundrie. Additionally, from the videos embedded in the articles, one can see that they were also able to transform the van into a camper and have filming equipment to document their lives while exploring and living in the van. The video illustrates Petito living a picturesque life, or at least life

portrayed as such on *YouTube* and *Instagram* and other social media platforms, from which social media influencers living similar lifestyles can nowadays earn quite good money, even though it seems that Petito was just beginning her career as a social media influencer. The depiction of a picturesque life of an influencer in the video is achieved by including screenshots from Petito's Instagram account and video clips of her video blog on YouTube.



Image 1 Screenshot from Petito's Instagram account included in the embedded video of the article (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16, 00:44)



Image 2 Screenshot of a video clip from Petito's vlog included in the embedded video of the article (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16, 01:00)

In these screenshots from the video, the life Petito and Laundrie were living is showcased. In image 1., Petito is wearing trendy athleisure wear and holding a sandboarding board. In image 2., Petito is sitting in their camper van. The video clips and images show that they were able to travel and explore around the United States, enjoy different activities, and wear trendy clothing, which all represents

their social status, depicting them as a successful white couple living their dream. Additionally, through these videos and images, the recipient can get a picture of their social status based on the material which is filmed with presumably more expensive and advanced filming equipment, such as a drone in image 3 below:



Image 3 Screenshot of a video clip taken by Petite and Laundry with a drone. The video clip shows them driving on a desert in their camper van (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16, 00:22)

Petite's appearance and race do come up more explicitly in the articles compared to social status through a description of Petite as well as through the included pictures and videos. Both articles cite the police description of Petite according to which Petite is "White, about 5 feet 5 inches tall and 110 pounds, with blonde hair, blue eyes and several tattoos, including one on her finger and one on her forearm that reads "Let it Be"" (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16; Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). However, it seems that this description is provided in order to reach out to possible eyewitnesses for information. In addition to race and appearance, her age is mentioned as it is typical for such news articles, in a subordinate clause: "Petite, 22, was reported missing..." (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16) Additionally, in the second published article she is twice referred to as a "young woman" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). Although the articles do not highlight her youth or age further, it does support the depiction of a young adventurous woman the articles convey.

Although the pictures of Petite embedded in the article support the police description of her, they also depict her in a certain way, reinforcing the image created in the article. The first published article includes pictures in which she is smiling and seemingly very happy (Image 4). Her appearance is very natural and conventionally beautiful. In both pictures, she is outside, and there is some greenery in the background, fitting the image of an adventurous young woman living the picturesque life of a

social media influencer. This depiction of her is supported by the headline of the video “Mysterious disappearance of Instagram adventurer” (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16).



Image 4 Thumbnail for the embedded video (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16)

Additionally, many clips of Petito and Laundrie smiling and enjoying life are included, emphasizing the representation of them living a happy life, as in the image 5 below, in which Petito and Laundrie are sitting in a tent, smiling and their camper van is showing in the background. Petito also states in the video clip “I love the van” (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16, 01:34):



Image 5 Screenshot of a video clip in which Petito and Laundrie are smiling, sitting in a tent and their camper van showing in the background (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16, 01:34)

The depiction of a happy ‘Instagram adventurer’ is contrasted in the second published article in which the thumbnail of the video embedded to the top of the article shows a screenshot from the police footage taken after the altercation between Petito and Laundrie (Image 6). In this screenshot Petito is clearly emotional, crying and has puffed, red eyes. Whereas the video in the first article only showcases the picturesque side of Petito’s life through the pictures, the second article emphasizes the

other, darker side through the screenshot of crying Petito, and an image of her van taken by the police for evidence:



Image 6 Thumbnail for the embedded video (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16)

With this juxtaposition, the articles sensationalize the disappearance of Petito: a young woman living her dream; happy and free, spending her time exploring and doing different activities with her seemingly loving boyfriend, disappears and left is a mystery to be solved and supposedly it is the loving boyfriend, who is responsible for the disappearance. This mysterious element is emphasized in the video embedded in the second article, as the same video clip screenshotted in image 3 is included, but as the voiceover of the news reporter states “Now, nowhere to be found” the image turns darker as well as black and white, visually highlighting that the vibrant life of Gabby Petito was darker behind the scenes, leading to her disappearance (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16, 2:58-3:00):



Image 7 Video clip of Petito and Laundrie edited darker and black and white (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16, 3:00)

Similarly to the case of *Petito*, there is no explicit reference to Moore's social status in the articles on her disappearance. Moore's background is not discussed other than through her mother's statement in the first article, according to which she describes her as a "homebody who loves playing video games and cooking. She is also best friends with her little brother, who she plays with constantly" highlighting that she had a happy, or what might be described as normal, homelife (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5). In addition to this description of Moore, the mother's statements such that "Jashyah is a smart girl, I can't reiterate that enough... She would not stay out, she would not go out, go off with anyone" enhance the image of her being a 'good girl' who would have no reason to run away from home. These statements connect to the fact that Black children are more likely to be labeled as runaways which leads to their cases to not be taken as seriously as well as to the study in which it was established that women of color believed that in order for them to be recognized as 'worthy' of media coverage, it would be needed to demonstrate that they are better than the perceived stereotypes of their racial group from which emphasizing Moore as a 'good girl' could emerge (Moss, 2019, p. 752; Neely, 2015, p. 9). The image of her smiling – even though seemingly included only for informative purposes – reinforces the image of her being happy and content with her life, supporting the assertion that Moore had no reason to run away from home on her own. Additionally, it is stated that she lives in East Orange, New Jersey where she also went missing. However, the articles do not comment on if the neighborhood is more affluent, middle or lower class, so if the recipient is not previously familiar with the area, Moore's social status does not appear in the articles.

In comparison to the other cases, the articles of Moore's disappearance emphasize her age. In both headlines Moore is not identified by her name but by her age: "a 14-year-old left home" and "14-year-old who vanished" (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5; Studley, 2021, Nov 11). The articles also include a statement from the Essex County Prosecutor Theodore Stephens II who states that "our society cannot ignore the fact that a 14-year-old girl, otherwise normal in all respects as far as we can tell, would disappear without a trace on a sunny day... This case cries out and demands our attention" (Studley, 2021, Nov 11). Thus, Moore's age and 'normality' is highlighted in these statements from the city official, conveying to the recipient that her disappearance is abnormal and the missing persons case of a young child is a serious matter. In addition to Moore's age, her race is discussed through Stephens' statements in which he reminds that "the lives of little Black and little brown girls is just as important as everybody else's lives" and brings up the notoriety of *Petito*'s case and how it yielded results (Studley, 2021, Nov 11). Therefore, the mention of Moore's race and age depicts her as a person who is often marginalized in the society and in a vulnerable position due to her age, and her

case is utilized in part of the societal discussion on MWWS, but also paradoxically results in the articles highlighting the depiction of her as a good girl.



Image 8 Picture of Moore included in both articles (Romine & Harring, 2021, Nov 5)

Furthermore, the articles do not discuss her appearance, as there is no description of what she was wearing as she went missing or other typical descriptions regarding missing persons cases such as hair color, height, or weight. The reason for the exclusion of these details is unclear, as the information has been available to the press prior to the articles being published based on, for example, ABC News covering of the case in which these details are described (Alfonseca, 2021, Nov 5). Both articles do, however, include a picture of Moore, most likely for identification purposes (Image 8). The picture has a plain background, is taken indoors, and shows Moore smiling and has a descriptive caption “Jashyah disappeared on the morning of October 14 while visiting a neighborhood deli close to her home in East Orange”, which again, is more informative than seeking to portray a specific picture of Jashyah Moore. Whereas the articles discussing the case of Petito depicted her as a vibrant Instagram adventurer, there is no such elaborate depiction of Moore, other than her mother emphasizing that she is a homebody and would not disappear on her own.

In the articles covering the case of Miya Marcano, some information is provided in order for the authorities to receive tips regarding the case. Right after stating that the sheriff’s office is urging the public to come forward with information to help find Marcano, the article states that “she was wearing a red shirt, jeans, and a black hoodie at her apartment complex when she was last seen, the sheriff’s office said Tuesday” (Riess, 2021, Sep 28). The same information is also presented in the second article. Both articles also include an embedded tweet from the Orange County Sheriff’s Office twitter

account, which reads “HELP FIND MIYA: Miya Marcano is still missing. We suspect foul play” and briefly discusses the person of interest and includes the number for the Crimeline where to call in for tips (Riess, 2021, Sep 28; Riess & Almas, 2021, Sep 30). Same information is provided in the missing person poster which is also included in the tweet. The missing person poster also states Marcano’s age, sex, race, hair, eye color, height and weight (Riess, 2021, Sep 28; Riess & Almas, 2021, Sep 30). The articles do not discuss her appearance or race or other characteristics in any other point. Therefore, these aspects and the information on what she was wearing prior to her disappearance are only included in the article for informative and identification purposes.



Image 9 Picture of Marcano included in both articles (Riess & Almas, 2021, Sep 30)

Furthermore, both articles include the same picture of Marcano, in which she is smiling widely and the upper part of her body, for example a tattoo close to her collar bone, is showing (Image 9). It seems that the picture is included in order for the possible eyewitnesses to recognize her, as the caption in both articles state descriptively that “Miya Marcano was last seen on Friday at the Orlando apartment complex where she lived and worked” (Riess, 2021, Sep 28; Riess & Almas, 2021, Sep 30). Thus, the picture and the caption sum up some relevant information; her name, when and where she was last seen, and what she looks like. However, even though the picture is included in the articles for identification purposes, it does create a certain image of Marcano to the recipient. As stated, in the picture Marcano is smiling widely, her teeth are showing, her eyes are also smiling – presenting a genuine smile – and she is looking directly at the camera. The background of the picture is a grey or white wall, and Marcano stands out in the picture as she is wearing a bright orange shirt and the light is hitting her face and teeth, creating a luminous look on her. To the recipient this creates an image of a woman with a presentable appearance who is living a happy life, the luminous look and

the bright shirt highlighting the happiness and brightness. However, when compared to the depictions of Moore and especially Petito, the articles do not establish a strong depiction of Marcano, and especially as there are no statements from her family included describing her characteristics or anything related to her life, the recipient is not provided with any information on what Marcano was like as a person.

Additionally, as in the other cases, her social status is not explicitly discussed. The articles state that she was last seen “at the Arden Villas Luxury Apartments in Orlando, where she lived and worked” from which the recipient can only gather that she had an apartment and a job (Riess, 2021, Sep 28). There is no mention of her living with anyone or what the neighborhood she lived in. As her social status, neither is her age emphasized at any point of the article, as the age is only mentioned in the first published article in a subordinate clause as is typical for such news articles: “Miya Marcano, 19, was last seen...” (Riess, 2021, Sep 28). The second article identifies her in the beginning of the article by not her name but her age: “The FBI is assisting in the search for a 19-year-old woman who went missing last Friday...” (Riess & Almasy, 2021, Sep 30). However, as stated, neither the social status of Marcano nor age is really emphasized in the article and utilized to create a certain depiction of her.

In contrast to the other articles, in the news articles discussing the case of Mary Johnson her race is very much emphasized. She is identified and referred to in the headline of the first article as a “Native American woman” and the second article “Mary Johnson, an Indigenous woman” (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18; Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). In the body text of the first article, when focusing on Johnson’s disappearance itself, the article does not highlight Johnson’s race as much as the second article. The article starts by introducing the topic of the article in which it states: “...Mary Johnson, a Native American woman who went missing from the Tulalip Reservation...” which is the only time Johnson’s race is mentioned directly in the text other than in the headline. However, as she went missing on the reservation, and the case was first investigated by the Tulalip Tribal Police, through mentioning these, references to her being an Indigenous woman are made. The second section of the article with the subheading “A crisis of missing Native American women” focuses on the fact that the cases of missing Indigenous women and girls are often disregarded by law enforcement and discusses the efforts of different parties to correct the issue (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). However, the article does not directly state any correlations between this issue and Johnson’s disappearance.

In contrast to the first published article not directly stating that there is a correlation between the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and Johnson’s case, the second article does,

in the text of the article, the headline as well as the video embedded in the article in which Johnson's siblings discuss the case. The headline of the article states "Mary Johnson, an Indigenous woman, went missing nearly a year ago. While FBI recently offered a reward, activists say that's not enough" implying that the authorities were too slow to act on the disappearance (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). In the text of the article Johnson's race is also referred to many times by stating that she was an enrolled citizen of the Tulalip Tribes and by her family stating that if Johnson was a White woman, the search efforts would have been much more extensive and that missing Native American women deserve the same treatment (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). The second published article also has two sections which discuss the issue of MMIW of which in the latter a direct reference to Johnson's case is made: "Johnson is just one of the countless missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls in the US" (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). Therefore, her case is used as an example of the wider societal issue in the articles.

Additionally, the articles include a statement from Detective David Sallee in which he speculates on what could have happened to Johnson and states that "it could be argued maybe she just wandered off in the woods and got lost. Maybe she overdosed and passed away... Maybe she's just hiding, maybe she's in treatment" and this is referred to – not directly, but most likely it is included in the article in order to highlight the issue – later in the article as Abigail Echo-Hawk, chief research officer for the Seattle Indian Health Board and an enrolled member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, states that Indigenous women are "assumed to have been killed, murdered or disappeared. They're assumed to have run away, to have had substance abuse issues, to have done something that caused them to go missing or to be murdered" (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). Thus, the article refers to the issue that Indigenous women are blamed for their own disappearances, resulting in a lack of empathy for victims from the general public as well as the authorities. With these correlations between MMIW and Johnson's case, the articles present Johnson as a representation of all missing and murdered Indigenous women, as her disappearance is used as an example in a news article which comments on the societal issue. The second article also directly states in a picture caption that "Johnson's case exemplifies many of the challenges in solving the cases of missing Indigenous women and girls" (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). Therefore, it is also stated that her case is an example of many cases in which the authorities and the public are not doing enough in order to solve the case. This is not to say that such attention to Johnson's case is bad, but it does evoke the question if her case would receive attention from a national news organization or the public if only the disappearance itself was discussed without the societal commentary. Perhaps not, as news coverage of a missing Indigenous woman discussing merely the disappearance on *CNN.com* could not be found.



Image 10 Picture of Johnson (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18).

As in the other cases, in the articles focusing on Johnson’s disappearance, her appearance is described for identification purposes: “Johnson is 5 feet, 6 inches tall and weighs 115 pounds. She has black hair, brown eyes and a “sunburst-type tattoo on her upper right arm,” the FBI said” (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). The same information is also provided in the second article in a picture caption. In the first article, there is one picture of Johnson, retrieved from Johnson’s missing person poster (Image 10). It is a close-up picture of Johnson’s face and is edited with what seems to be a sepia filter. In the picture Johnson is smiling lightly. The caption of the picture states that a reward for information has been announced, and when Johnson was last seen (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). Due to the caption and the photo being a close-up picture of Johnson’s face, it seems that the picture is included for identification purposes like the abovementioned description of her. For the recipient, the image does not create any strong implications on what Johnson was like as a person other than her being perhaps quite content with her life due to the slight smile, especially, as the article does not provide other information on her characteristics or personality.

The second article, however, does paint a much clearer picture on Johnson’s life in general and sheds light on her personality. There are more pictures included of her, which also seem to be for identification purposes, but the article also has an embedded video which also includes pictures of Johnson as her sister’s talk about her and the case. In the video, a picture of a happy person, who is close to her family, is created (Image 11). The video is edited so that it has video clips of Johnson’s siblings speaking and a montage of pictures of Johnson, in all of which she is shown smiling and many in which she is spending time with her family. She is depicted as a warm person, who has good ties to her family (Image 12). This depiction is achieved especially in the video as a montage of

Johnson's pictures is showing, and her sister, Nona Blouin, voice is heard as a voice over, speaking of Johnson: "I miss her personality, her warm personality. Her jokes, her smiling face, her laugh, you know she would snort when she'd laugh" (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23, 01:17-01:30). As Blouin mentions that Johnson has a warm personality, the picture shown presents her smiling posing with Blouin, indicating sisterly intimacy and comfort, as she holds her hand on her shoulders and Blouin is leaning her head towards Johnson. When Blouin states that she misses Johnson's jokes, smiling face, and her laugh, the video shows a picture of Johnson playing happily with her other sister, Gerry Davis and a baby. Thus, each picture supports the statements made by her sister, emphasizing the depiction of her.



Image 11 Screenshot from the video, Johnson smiling with Blouin (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23, 01:18)



Image 12 Screenshot from the video, Johnson playing with her sister and a baby (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23, 01:23)

In the text of the second article this depiction of a seemingly happy person who is close with her family is contrasted in the statements of her sister, Gerry Davis, who states that Johnson and her

husband abruptly moved away from her house and rarely answered her phone, when the family tried to reach her and was not acting herself (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). The odd circumstances of her disappearance are thus highlighted, as she once was very close with her family but started to distance herself.

Furthermore, the article does not directly mention her social status, but does make some references based on which the recipient can make assumptions. The article highlights her uncertain living situation, as it is mentioned that she was not living with her estranged husband but was moving from place to place, staying with friends who she also relied on to be driven from place to place (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). Although it is not directly stated, this information implies that perhaps her financial situation was not as secure as one would hope for. Additionally, it is stated she lived on the reservation, the image of her possibly living in poverty is reinforced, as it is commonly known that Native American poverty is an issue in American society, and organizations advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples and marginalized groups often speak publicly about the matter (e.g. National Congress of American Indians, 2020; The Red Road, 2022). The article also refers to her possibly having a substance abuse problem, although it is not presented as confirmed fact but the speculation comes from a person in an authority position, Detective Sallee, as he states that maybe she overdose, is in hiding or in treatment (Example 25) (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). Therefore, the references to her uncertain living situation, not having a vehicle, living on the reservation where the poverty rates are often higher than in other places and references to possible substance abuse problems do arguably imply to the recipient that her social status was not positive at the time of her disappearance.

In addition to her social status, race and appearance, the articles do mention her age in passing, but do not put emphasis on it when recounting the events. In the first article, her age is mentioned in a subordinate clause as typical for such articles: “Mary Johnson, 40, also known as Mary Johnson Davis, was reported missing...” and in the second article it is stated that “Johnson, an enrolled citizen of the Tulalip Tribes and then 39 years old, was walking on a road...” (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18; Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). Other than these mentions, the articles do not refer to her age at any point or depict Johnson in a certain way because of it.

In summary, out of all four cases, the case of Gabby Petito is sensationalized through how she is depicted in the articles. Although the articles do not explicitly highlight her race, age, social status or appearance, she is depicted as a young woman, living her dream life: a conventionally beautiful young woman exploring around the United States with her boyfriend, while documenting their lives online.

The news organization does not only sensationalize her disappearance by intensively covering the case but also by visually illustrating how the seemingly perfect and happy life has a darker layer underneath all the picturesque portrayals on Petito's YouTube channel and Instagram account. This depiction is achieved by calling the case a "mysterious disappearance of an Instagram adventurer" and by juxtaposing video clips and pictures of Petito and Laundrie being happy, laughing and exploring new places and activities with the police body camera footage of Petito crying due to the physical altercation between Petito and Laundrie. This juxtaposition in depiction of Petito brings an additional mysterious and tragic element to the case, intriguing people to publicly discuss and seek to understand how a young woman living the dream would go missing.

The articles on the other cases do not so extensively depict the missing person in such way as the articles focusing on Gabby Petito. In the articles of Marcano's case, the articles do not as widely discuss Marcano's personality or her life in general, so it seems that the articles mostly focus on stating the facts about the case, not to build a certain depiction of her as a person. Her race, appearance, and age are only mentioned briefly in the articles. From the picture included, one can see a beautiful smiling Black woman, but as nothing else about her life is discussed, this is the only depiction the recipient receives. In the articles of Moore's case, the articles emphasize her young age and that she loved being home and spend time with her family, conveying to the reader the question; why would a young girl, who seemingly had no reason to run away, vanish in middle of the day and not be heard from in days? However, due to the shortness of the articles and the lack of visuals, this depiction is not built as far as in the case of Gabby Petito. Additionally, as stated, Moore's race is highlighted in the articles as the city officials use the known bias of MWWS to get attention to Moore's case. Therefore, her race is not highlighted in order for the articles to depict Moore's life or personality in a certain way but more to garner empathy from the public, as she is presented as a young black girl, disregarded by the public who focuses on the disappearance of Gabby Petito. In Johnson's case her social status, and race are referenced more as in the cases of Moore and Marcano but her age and appearance are only mentioned for the purpose of reaching out to possible eyewitnesses. Johnson is depicted in the second article as a warm and happy person, who was close to her family through Johnson's sisters statements and the pictures shown in the video embedded in the article. This is juxtaposed with the statements in the article, as it is stated that she suddenly distanced herself from her family prior to her disappearance. Therefore, the article creates a depiction of a person, whose life had somehow turned for the worse. However, this depiction is not taken as far in such a dramatic way as in Gabby Petito's case, as there are no such illustrations and clear juxtapositions made. Additionally, the articles discussing Johnson's disappearance focus more on her

race, and the unfair treatment Johnson and other missing and murdered Native American women face from the law enforcement and the public. Therefore, the articles concentrate mostly on utilizing Johnson's case as an example of many, mostly focusing on the societal issue rather than the case itself, and the case is not sensationalized in such way as Petito's case was.

4.3 Emotional appeals and damsels in distress – how is need for public attention manifested

In all four cases, the reporting relies widely on the investigating authorities' statements on the cases. The statements provide information on the circumstances of the disappearance, the investigation, and convey to the reader what is the missing persons' state of being in danger. In these articles, the statements from the authorities *authorize* the information on the disappearance, which according to van Leeuwen (2007) means the legitimation by reference to authority (p. 92). Van Leeuwen (2007) defines legitimation as something that answers the question of 'Why', more specifically, 'Why should we do this' or do this in certain way (p. 93). However, I would extend the definition to also answering the question of 'Why should we believe this information.' The authorities in these articles are what van Leeuwen (2007) calls an *expert authority*, meaning that the legitimacy is provided by expertise: the authorities are experts in investigating and solving missing persons cases and crimes (pp. 94-95). Furthermore, as the word *authorities* indicates, the law enforcement and other officials have, based on customs and the structure of society, a certain authoritative position by default due to their profession. Therefore, when information is cited to be from an authority, the public is more likely to believe it. However, by choosing what statements are included in the articles can greatly affect what is the recipients perception of the case. Although it must be noted that this position of authority and some actions of authorities have been questioned in societal discourse especially during the last couple of years in the United States and Western society due to the discussion on police brutality, which might diminish the public's trust in the authority.

In addition to the statements from the authorities, in most of the cases, the missing persons' families are a salient voice present in the articles. Bednarek and Caple (2012) list *personalization* as one of the elements used to create newsworthiness in a story (p. 41). In news articles of missing persons cases, the statements from the family bring a human-interest element to the stories, meaning that the cases attract attention and sympathy as they involve the experiences of real people, thus establishing news value to the story. I argue that this is an important part of news coverage on missing persons cases. The more people relate or feel empathy towards a case, perhaps thinking how they would feel

if someone close to them would go missing, the more they want to help by volunteering for search efforts, donating money, or bringing attention to the case, which all is very important in order to solve the case. For example, we can only wonder if the case of Madeleine McCann would be closer to become solved 15 years later, if people did not keep talking about the case. Through the statements from the authorities and the families, the articles narrate a story of the disappearance, focusing on what happened prior to and after the disappearance, and the discoveries and efforts made in the investigation. Additionally, the emotional pleas, stated by both the families as well as the authorities highlight the concern they have for the missing person. The overall information provided creates an implication of what is the missing persons' state of being in danger and the urgency in finding them, which all plays into what the public's response to the disappearance is.

This is important for the cases, as it might affect the public's willingness to help. If the person is considered to have gone missing on their own, the case might not receive the attention it needs as often the public, as well as the authorities, consider it the person's right to go missing. When someone disappears because of a crime has occurred, it increases the newsworthiness of a disappearance, as in addition to personalization, Bednarek and Caple (2012) define *negativity*, meaning the negative aspects of a story 'the basic news value' (p. 42). This is of course different in the cases of underage people but if a child runs away from home, it is still considered less tragic and less urgent, as in the cases of foul play or a medical emergency. This is not only problematic because it could be argued that a child is always in possible danger when they are not in the care of reliable adults but as discussed in section 2., Black children are more likely considered runaways by the authorities and therefore, their cases are not often taken seriously enough. According to Stillman (2007), the news coverage of missing women takes advantage of the depiction of 'damsel in distress' and public's willingness of accepting White females as such; news organizations present anecdotes and images of the missing women, other public figures speculate the events and possible suspects on different media platforms while the public participates in the discussion of 'every parent's worst nightmare' and this all plays into the case being sensationalized (p. 492). As discussed in section 2. Missing White Woman Syndrome, White women more readily qualify as damsels in distress, especially if they also have the 'right' qualities of social status and other relevant variables (Stillman, 2007, p. 492). Therefore, in this section, I will analyze how the need for public attention and concern for the missing persons' well-being and safety is narrated in the articles and how it increases the newsworthiness of the story.

4.3.1 *“Finding this girl is what matters” – the case of Petito*

In the articles discussing the case of Gabby Petito, the stance of the Petito family is strongly represented. In the first article, there are ten paragraphs including statements of Petito family’s side from the overall 25 paragraphs and eleven from the overall 35 in the second published article. The majority of these statements are very emotionally charged, aimed to appeal to the public as well as to Brian Laundrie who Petito family blames for her disappearance and the family of Brian Laundrie who they believe are protecting their son. The statements from the family are quotes from Petito’s father, mother and stepfather. Additionally, the articles cite a Petito family letter presented via their attorney. Both articles also include embedded videos discussed in the previous section but in this section only the written part of the articles are considered.

Firstly, the statements from the family highlight the emotional stress the family is under, seeking for empathy from the public. Both articles focusing on the case of Petito include the same statement from Joe Petito, Petito’s father, in which he emphasizes the importance of finding Petito by stating that “this is what matters, finding this girl is what matters... Anything else comes second to this” while pointing at a photo of Petito (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). This statement depicts the urgency the family feels in finding Petito and the phrasing of the statement does not specify that it is only the priority of the family to find Gabby Petito but that it is the priority of the society to find her. This was also reflected in the discourse in the news and social media during the height of the media frenzy of Petito’s case, as discussion on different social media platforms was constant and massive amounts of people were volunteering in order to help in the search efforts and some groups of people also camped out at the Laundrie home, hoping to pressure them into talking to the authorities. The family’s despair is also illustrated in the public letter which Petito family released via their attorney in which they speak directly at the Laundries and state that “we haven’t been able to sleep or eat, and our lives are falling apart...” and “we beg you to tell us as a parent, how could you let us go through this pain and not help us? As a parent, how could you put Gabby’s younger brothers and sisters through this (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16). Although the letter and the statements in the letter are directly aimed at Brian Laundrie and his family, they are also aimed to emotionally appeal to the public, as they highlight the family’s despair while looking for their loved one, garnering feelings of empathy and willingness to help, especially as Petito’s father is quoted directly asking for help: “I’m asking for help from everyone here. I’m asking from everyone at hope. I’m asking for help from the parents of Brian...” (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16). Therefore indicating that the family does not only need the help of the Laundries in order to solve the case, but also that of the public.

Most notably however, the statements of the Petito family create a narrative of Brian Laundrie being guilty of Petito's disappearance as the excerpts included from the public letter directly address him and his family and blame them on knowing what happened to Petito. In these statements, the family emphasizes the paradoxicality of Laundrie supposedly loving Petito but him not doing anything in order to help solving the case by stating that "help find who Brian referred to as the love of his life... How does Brian stay in the background where he is the one person that knows where Gabby is located" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). Furthermore, a statement from the Petito family attorney who speaks on behalf of the family is included in which he addresses the Laundries by stating that "we beg you to do the right thing and help us bring Gabby home... You tarnish your love for her with your silence" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). In this example, more dramatic words and phrasing such as *we beg* and *tarnish your love* are used again to highlight Laundrie's horrendous – at this point alleged – actions by contrasting them to his supposed love for Petito. In addition to the family directly blaming Laundrie, Petito's stepfather, Jim Schmidt states that even though Petito would at times not be in constant contact with her family due to her living situation and her exploring different areas, it is uncommon for her not to contact her family in such a long time (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). Thus, further emphasizing that she would not disappear on her own.

The abovementioned statements from the Petito family blaming Laundrie are in response to the Laundrie family statement in which they state via their attorney that the family will remain in the background and will not comment on the case further as well as stating that "It is our understanding that a search has been organized for Miss Petito in or near Grand Teton Nation Park in Wyoming" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). The inclusion of the statement from the Laundrie family could be to imply objectivity from the news outlets side, allowing each party involved to be heard, but as the article discusses the statements in relation to each other, it emphasizes the message of the Petito family, in which they call the Laundrie's silence "reprehensible" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). Therefore, the articles contrast the Petito family's very emotional statements to the more straightforward, impassive statements from the Laundrie family which depicts them in a disadvantageous light juxtaposing one family grieving for their daughter and the other family seemingly not having an emotional reaction to the situation. Through the Petito family's statements, the articles create an urgency in finding Petito, as they highlight the family's worry for their daughter and indicate that it is believed that Petito was a victim of Laundrie.

In addition to the statements from the families of Petito and Laundrie, the disappearance of Petito is mostly recounted through the statements from the authorities, as they are quoted in the first published

article in 11 paragraphs and 21 paragraphs in the second published article. More specifically, the articles cite the police in North Port, Florida, North Port Police Chief Todd Garrison and spokesperson Josh Taylor, Moab City Police Department in Utah, and a report written by police officers Eric Pratt and Daniel Robbins. Additionally, some statements are more generally stated to be from *the police*. The statements from the authorities include a description of Petito's appearance and discuss the investigation as well as what is known about the circumstances of the disappearance. On the surface, the statements from the authorities are included not only so that the public is informed on the events but also to garner possible leads in order to solve the case. Although the authorities are more objective in their statements, the information included through the authorities statements together with the statements from the family of Petito, enhance the portrayal of Petito as a victim of Laundrie and the urgency to solve the case.

The objectivity of the authorities comes through especially in the first published article in which the authorities state that the focus of the investigation is not at the moment to "bring Brian in right now" and that Laundrie is exercising his constitutional rights which the authorities have to respect (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16). However, the statements included in the second article regarding Laundrie's silence are not as objective anymore, as a statement from Josh Taylor, a spokesperson for the North Port Florida Police department is included in which he states that "he needs to talk to us" regarding Laundrie and that when the police tried to get information from Laundrie and his family the authorities "were essentially handed the information for their attorney... that is the extent of our conversation with them" as well as Taylor stating that to his understanding the authorities have had some conversations with Laundrie's attorney but "certainly nothing to the level of providing us the details that we would like" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). In addition to discussing Laundrie's silence, the authorities statements indicate worry for the well-being of Petito, as Taylor is quoted saying that "someone who's been traveling and contacting family and then all of a sudden goes dark -- that's obviously odd" as well as "we are concerned and we're working as quick as we can to get resolution" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). Therefore, indicating to the recipient that the safety and well-being of Petito is at risk and all the evidence provided in the articles implying the guiltiness of Laundrie.

Additionally, both articles emphasize a physical altercation between Petito and Laundrie had in Utah couple weeks prior to the disappearance of Petito, according to the information on the articles. The altercation is emphasized in the articles, as both include a subsection in which the altercation is discussed through statements derived from a police report written by Officer Pratt and Robbins who

were present after the physical fight between Petito and Laundrie. It is stated in both articles that the couple did not want to report a crime and the officers evaluated the situation as a mental health crisis rather than domestic assault, as Petito seemed confused and emotional:

“Both the male and female reported they are in love and engaged to be married and desperately didn’t wish to see anyone charged with a crime,” according to the report from Officer Eric Pratt / ...Petito was described by an officer as “confused and emotional.” / After evaluating the totality of the circumstances, I do not believe the situation escalated to the level of a domestic assault as much of a mental health crisis,” Officer Daniel Robbins wrote in the police report (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16)

Although the statements from the police report by Officer Pratt and Robbins are to an extent speculative due to them being the authorities understanding regarding what happened between Petito and Laundrie, it still seems to provide the reader of the article reliable and legitimized information on the circumstances prior to the disappearance; the recipient might perceive the officer’s speculative statements as facts due to the person’s authority position. However, what is excluded from recounting of the police report in the news article, is the information of Gabby Petito having been the assumed instigator of the physical altercation (Rose, 2022, Jan 13). After the release of the police footage, which is also directly linked to Petito’s disappearance in the articles as the physical altercation is emphasized in relation to the news of the missing persons case and the video headline of the second article “bodycam footage raises more questions about missing woman,” many have criticized the officers’ actions claiming that they minimized the possible danger Petito might have been in and have argued that the police officers should have taken Petito’s distress more seriously and assumed that she was a victim in the situation (Moshtagian et al., 2021, Sep 16; Rose, 2022, Jan 13). In the article, nonetheless, the information of Gabby Petito having been the assumed instigator in the situation is omitted, leaving it up to the recipient to fill in that information of the instigator of the physical altercation and as the positioning of the different parties in the news article is that Petito is the victim and Laundrie the suspect, it is easy for the reader to interpret Petito as having been a victim of domestic assault already prior to her disappearance. As the articles focus on this physical altercation and depict Petito as emotional and confused, possibly a victim of a domestic assault, the articles emphasize the depiction of her as a damsel in distress; a woman in need of saving from a man.

In summary, the articles focusing on the disappearance of Petito highlight great urgency in finding her. This is manifested through the very emotional appeals from the Petito family, in which they

highlight the emotional stress their daughters disappearance causes them as well the authorities indicating their concerns for Petito's well-being and safety. The concern and frustration of solving the case is further manifested as the Petito family directly blame the Laundrie family and their impassive response is juxtaposed to the very emotional statements of the Petito family as well as the authorities indications to Laundrie being guilty and stating that Laundrie needs to talk to them. Furthermore, the articles concentrate on the physical altercation, highlighting possible past patterns of possible domestic assault and physical altercations omitting the fact that Petito was instigator in the situation, emphasizes her position as a victim and Laundrie as the 'villain' of the story, focusing the negative aspects of the case, and thus increasing the newsworthiness of the case and depicting Petito as a damsel in distress, in need of saving.

4.3.2 "She did not run away. She was abducted" – the case of Moore

The articles covering the case of Jashyah Moore include statements from Moore's family, more specifically her mother, Jamie Moore. She is referred to in four paragraphs of the first article of the overall nine paragraphs which include statements and in two paragraphs of the overall six in the second published article. When comparing the amount of the statements included in the articles to the articles focusing on the case of Petito, it should be noted that the family of Moore does not receive such a platform to express their worry as the family of Petito does. However, similarly to the case of Petito, the statements from Moore's mother illustrate the emotional aspect of the case as the statements are emotionally appealing, pleading for information from the public.

Whereas in the articles focusing on the disappearance of Gabby Petito the statements from the family illustrate the emotional stress the family is under due to their daughter's disappearance and conveying the message of Laundrie being a guilty party in the case, the statements from Jamie Moore focus on convincing the recipient that Moore is not a runaway child. As discussed in section 4.2, the mother's statements describe Moore as a "smart girl... she would not stay out, she would not go out, go off with anyone" and describing her as a homebody, who likes playing video games and cooking and noting that she is best friends with her little brother (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5). Additionally, the second article notes the mother's argument more clearly as it includes a statement in which Jamie Moore states that "she did not run away. She was abducted. I don't know who did it, but we're looking for you" thus speaking directly to the possible abductor as well as seeking to convince the public that her daughter is indeed not a runaway. This connects to the fact stated in section 2., as according to Moss (2019), children of minorities are more likely to be labeled as runaways and therefore their cases are not often taken as seriously as those of white children. In addition, the mother's statements

refer to the belief many women of color believe that in order for them to be recognized as ‘worthy’ of media coverage, there is a need to demonstrate that they are better than the perceived stereotypes of their racial group, which is also seen in the statements of Moore’s mother, as she describes Moore as a homebody, who would not run away from her loving family (Neely, 2015, p. 9). Although the included statements of Moore’s mother do not refer to the emotional stress the family is experiencing due to Moore’s disappearance, it is stated that she “cannot imagine what she [Jashyah Moore] might be going through from just being away from us this long, being away from her family that loves her very much” (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5). Therefore, the statements included in the article from Jamie Moore, Moore’s mother, seek to assure the public of her child being in danger. Although as stated previously, it could be argued that although a child is a runaway and not missing due to foul play, they are always in danger.

In the articles discussing the case of Jashyah Moore, the statements from the authorities also function as an appeal to the public for information, in addition to informing them on the different aspects of the case. The first published article has indirect and direct quotations from Police Chief Phyllis Bindi and the Essex County Acting Prosecutor Theodore Stephens II as well as more broadly from the *city officials* (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5). In total, five of the overall 10 paragraphs include statements from the authorities. The article discusses the last known movements of Moore before her disappearance through the statements from these officials, as it is stated that “a 14-year-old girl in New Jersey has been missing for more than 20 days after she walked to a local deli and never returned” (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov). However, the articles do not go much into detail on the circumstances of the disappearance, other than stating that the “Surveillance footage from the deli shows a man paying for her items at the store, but they did not leave together. The man in the footage is cooperating fully with police, and there is no indication of foul play at this time” (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5). Therefore, other than the mother stating that Moore was abducted, the information provided in the articles through the statements of the authorities does not point to Moore having been a victim in her disappearance and the statements do not elaborate on, for example, what is the authorities understanding of the movements of Moore after she was seen at the local deli.

Although the authorities statements do not go into much detail about the circumstances of the disappearance, and the investigation, they do indicate worry and urgency in finding Moore. Especially, the statements seek to emotionally appeal to the people by emphasizing the importance of attention to the case by referring to the known bias of MWWS and Moore’s young age. For example, the article quotes the city officials asking for any help that can be provided “calling it a

community effort to get Jashyah home” and the Essex County Prosecutor Stephens II highlighting how important it is to keep talking about the case, so it stays in the public eye (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5). This statement does not only appeal emotionally to the public to help a member of their community but also moves some responsibility of finding Moore on them. This is emphasized further as Stephens is quoted stating that “our society cannot ignore the fact that a 14-year-old girl, otherwise normal in all respects as far as we can tell, would disappear without a trace on a sunny day...” (Studley, 2021, Nov 11). Therefore, the authorities statements support the mother’s depiction of Moore’s ‘normality’ and that she would not have had a reason to run away from home, and therefore, the audience should pay more attention to the case.

The responsibility of the community as well as the media is further highlighted in both articles as Stephens is quoted using the known racial disparity in the amount of attention a missing persons case receives as a leverage to appeal to people:

This reminds us that the lives of little Black and little brown girls is just as important as everybody else’s lives...And we know that Gabby Petito, which is very, very notorious case that was constantly in the news did yield results and information. So we are hoping that today’s effort will also bring some information so we can find young Jashyah. (Studley, 2021, Nov 11)

The article also supports this claim by including a paragraph in which the issue of MWWS is discussed by stating that the cases of missing White women have been given more focus and urgency, people of color are disappearing at disproportionate rates, using FBI data to support the claim (Romine & Haring, 2021, Nov 5; Studley, 2021, Nov 11). Additionally, according to Bednarek and Caple (2012), timeliness, meaning the relevance of the even in terms of time, is one of the elements increasing news value (p. 42). Therefore, as the articles focus on the societal issue of MWWS in addition to merely discussing Moore’s disappearance, it arguably increases the newsworthiness of the story due to the discussion of the topic emerging in public discourse following the sensationalizing of Petito’s case. In the abovementioned statement of Stephens and throughout the article not only is the MWWS highlighted in order to appeal to people but also Moore’s age, as Moore is referred to as a “14-year-old girl,” “little Black girl,” and “young Jashyah” which appeals to the public emotionally and highlighting urgency, as a young person who goes missing is most likely to stir emotions of empathy, as children are, of course, seen as needing the protection of adults and the society, as they are not able to take care of themselves to the extent of adults’ ability.

To conclude, the need for concern in the case of Moore and the urgency in finding her is manifested in the articles through statements of Moore's mother as well as the authorities highlighting her age and the claim that she had no reason to run away from home. Therefore, arguably as there is no suspect in the case and the concern for Moore does not manifest in the circumstances of the disappearance or the investigation, the information provided in the articles seek to convince the recipient that one should pay attention to the disappearance by highlighting the beforementioned matters in addition to the issue of MWWS. Whereas in the case of Gabby Petito, the negative aspects of the case were emphasized, depicting Petito as a victim and establishing news value to the case, I argue that in the case of Moore, MWWS is highlighted in order to increase the newsworthiness and to garner public's attention to the case as Moore does not on her own, qualify as a 'damsel in distress.'

4.3.3 "I want to reiterate, Miya is still missing" – the case of Marcano

In articles regarding the case of Miya Marcano, most of the information is provided through the statements from the authorities, more specifically, Sheriff John Mina and the sheriff's office. The first article includes 12 paragraphs of statements from the authorities and the second article ten. The articles do not include statements from any other parties, for example Marcano's family. The statements provide information on the circumstances of Marcano's disappearance, the investigation, and a description of her.

All the information provided in the articles points to Marcano having been a victim of foul play and the authorities knowing who the person responsible is. This is implied already in the headline of the first article which states "A Florida woman is missing and a man police were looking for appears to have killed himself" (Riess, 2021, Sep 28). As the headline indicates, the article focuses on recounting the circumstances of the disappearance which point to the main suspect, Caballero, being guilty of Marcano's disappearance. The article states, for example, that right after Marcano was reported missing, the detectives determined Caballero being the person of interest in the disappearance (Riess, 2021, Sep 28). This is supported in the articles by recounting what the authorities have detected in their investigation by stating that Caballero had shown romantic interest in Marcano but was repeatedly rejected by her and that he had been in possession of a maintenance-issued master key fob prior to Marcano's disappearance which the authorities believe he used to enter Marcano's apartment without her permission (Riess, 2021, Sep 28; Riess & Almas, 2021, Sep 30). Whereas the first article published focuses on the circumstances of the disappearance of Marcano, the second article, as indicated in the headline "FBI joins search for Miya Marcano, who has been missing in Florida for

nearly a week,” focuses on the investigation and discusses the variety of efforts the authorities have made to look for Marcano, such that nearly 30 searches have been conducted around the area since Marcano’s disappearance and that the searches are being conducted with specially trained canines, dive teams, helicopters, and other aviation assets (Riess & Almasy, 2021, Sep 30). Therefore, all the information provided in the articles illustrate to the recipient that the authorities have determined that Marcano was a victim of foul play by Caballero and the search efforts suggest that they are not necessarily assuming that Marcano is found alive.

Although all the information discussed about the circumstances of the disappearance and the investigation point to an extent that the case has been solved, as the suspect is known, the authorities still seek to emotionally appeal to the public in order to find Marcano. Sheriff Mina states that “I want to reiterate, Miya is still missing. Her disappearance is suspicious, and our detectives and the family members obviously suspect foul play” as well as urging “anyone with any information, no matter how insignificant it may seem, to call OCSO [Orange County Sheriff’s Office]” (Riess, 2021, Sep 28). These statements are the only emotionally appealing statements indicating urgency in the case in addition to a statement from Mina included in the second published article in which he states that the Sheriff’s office has “been in contact with Miya’s family and friends every single day, numerous times a day, trying to keep them updated on everything that we’re doing” (Riess & Almasy, 2021, Sep 30). Although these statements from the authorities are to an extent emotionally appealing, pleading for information from the public, when comparing the articles to those of Moore and especially Petito, there is no similar urgency in finding her indicated. The abovementioned statement from Sheriff Mina is the only statement which refers to Marcano’s family, and therefore an important emotional aspect is lacking from the articles, which might highlight the need for concern and urgency in Marcano’s case.

The lack of statements from Marcano’s family is not due to the statements of family members not being available to *CNN*, as other national news media outlets have released articles including citations from her family. For example, on September 28, *ABC News* published an article “Miya Marcano’s family search for clues for 19-year-old’s whereabouts” which included video clips from the press conference in which John Mina and Marcano’s family are cited as a source. More specifically the video included clips of Marcano’s aunt Pia Scarbriel-Henry stating that “Miya, any time something should happen, fight. Because we have your back. We cherish you. You are the family’s princess. We miss you, and fight” (Pereira, 2021, Sep 28, 1:09-1:22). Additionally, the text in the article includes a statement from a cousin of Marcano, Caili Sue, stating that “I’m determined, and I’m still

very hopeful we're going to find her" (Pereira, 2021, Sep 28). It seems that the statements in the *ABC News* article are from the same press conference as the statements included in the *CNN* articles. Out of all the six news articles published on *CNN* about the case of Miya Marcano, there are no statements from the family. The last two articles "Medical examiner confirms body found in wooded area in Orlando is Miya Marcano" and "Miya Marcano's family files wrongful death lawsuit against her apartment complex" include statements from the Marcano Family's attorney, who speaks for the family, but there are no statements directly from the family themselves.

Arguably, emotionally appealing statements from the family are a typical convention in news coverage of missing persons cases but it remains unclear why the articles focusing on the case of Marcano do not include any. However, the comparison of the overall amount of news coverage to that of Petito's case as well as the urgency indicated in finding them suggest that her case did not qualify to be such a sensationalized missing persons case as Petito's did. The cases of the women are similar in many ways; both are young missing females and the suspect in whom the evidence points to, is either a man in a romantic relationship with the woman or wants a romantic relationship with the woman. Interestingly, however, only one of their cases became sensationalized internationally.

4.3.4 "She is not normally gone that long" – the case of Johnson

Similarly to the cases of Petito and Moore, the articles focusing on the disappearance of Mary Johnson include emotionally appealing statements from Johnson's family. More specifically, her sisters Gerry Davis and Nona Blouin. However, when comparing the number of statements from the family to those focusing on the case of Petito, less statements are included, especially in the first article, as the family is cited only in three paragraphs. The second published article of Johnson's case focuses on the case much more extensively and the family is referred to in six paragraphs. The second article also includes an embedded video in which Johnson's case is discussed, but in this section only the written article will be focused on.

The statements from Johnson's family function as emotional appeals to the public for information and speak also directly to Johnson as well as to the person possibly responsible for her disappearance. In the first published article, Johnson's sister is quoted saying that "if Mary has seen this video, please contact somebody, reach out some way if you're in trouble" and "if she's not okay, let her come home. Bring her home, for closure, for us, if it happened that way. Because it is an awful feeling to not know where you are at" (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). Thus, illustrating the emotional stress the family feels in not knowing what happened to their sister. Johnson's sisters are also quoted describing

Johnson as a wonderful person who they all love dearly after which they plea for information, asking for people with any information to reach out to their local law enforcement and “bring her home. We miss her” (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). Further describing their despair in finding Johnson and indicating the need for concern in her case, so that she could be found. Additionally, family of Johnson also provide some information on the circumstances of the disappearance, depicting how Johnson was not acting herself around the time of the disappearance, as she had abruptly moved 40 miles away from her sister’s place after which she distanced herself from her family, indicating that maybe something was wrong in her personal life (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). This statement implies to the recipient that prior Johnson had been relatively close with her family, perhaps indicating that something odd has occurred in her personal life around the time of her disappearance. However, although Johnson had distanced herself from her family, her sister, Gerry Davis is quoted stating that Johnson “is not normally gone that long” (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). Therefore, the statements of the family indicate that perhaps something has happened to Johnson, as she is not in contact with them for unusually long time.

Furthermore, similarly to the statements from the Essex County Prosecutor Stephens II in the articles focusing on the disappearance of Moore, Johnson’s family also use the known bias of MWWS and MMIW as a leverage to get publicity and seeking empathy for Johnson and the case:

If that was a little White girl out there or a White woman, I’m sure they would have had helicopters, airplanes and dogs and searches -- a lot of manpower out there -- scouring where that person was lost... None of that has happened to our sister. (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23)

As stated in section 4.2, the articles on Johnson’s disappearance focus heavily on the issue of MMIW and use the disappearance of Johnson mostly as an example of many Indigenous women whose cases do not get the attention from the authorities or the media similarly to the cases of White women. Therefore, such statements from the family as well as the overall message of the articles indicate to the reader that this case should be paid attention to, and as mentioned in relation to Moore’s case, the timeliness of the topic increases the news value of Johnson’s story.

However, when it comes to the need for concern of Johnson’s well-being and safety in terms of foul play, the articles do not indicate as great of an urgency in finding Johnson when compared to the cases of Moore and especially Petit. The first article on Johnson’s disappearance does not provide much detail about the circumstances of her disappearance or the investigation, as only five paragraphs in which the authorities are cited are included in the article. The information provided about the

disappearance is seemingly derived from the FBI's Most Wanted website, thus only focusing on the basics, such as that where she disappeared from, when she was reported missing and information on the reward offered by the FBI leading to solving of her case, information on her appearance as well as the FBI asking for information regarding her location and disappearance (Elassar, 2021, Sep 18). Therefore, mostly leaving it up to the family's statements to imply the urgency in finding her. The second article, however, elaborates on many details, as it includes eight paragraphs in which the authorities are cited, and are based on the information from the FBI as well as *CNN* interview with the Tulalip Tribal Police Department Detective Sallee and a local news report in *The Everett Herald* newspaper (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). The statements from Detective Sallee describe in detail the circumstances of the disappearance as well as what the authorities have determined based on the investigation. The information provided recount Johnson's uncertain living situation, estranged relationship from her husband who dropped her off to a friend's house on the Tulalip reservation a day before her going missing (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). The articles do not indicate any possible suspects the authorities have, other than stating that a billboard on the Interstate close to the reservation as well as the local media coverage have yielded few credible tips, but the authorities are yet to make an arrest, even though they have multiple persons of interest (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23). The circumstances of the disappearance that are described in the articles, however, do indicate to the recipient that something odd might have been going on, as Detective Sallee is quoted saying that they believe that someone might have picked Johnson up at some point based on the cell phone records which indicate her moving such a distance in a time in which she could not have walked (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23).

Although the authorities state that they have multiple persons of interest and describe the odd circumstances of Johnson's disappearance, they do cast some doubt in whether Johnson went missing due to foul play or on her own, as detective Sallee is quoted saying:

“We don't know if she was kidnapped, held against her will, if she has been murdered. It could be argued maybe she just wandered off in the woods and got lost. Maybe she overdosed and passed away somewhere in a remote area and we don't know where she's at. Maybe she's just hiding, maybe she's in treatment... There's a lot of maybes.” (Kaur, 2021, Sep 23)

Both possibilities of course mean that there is a great possibility of her being in danger, but as the article leaves much speculation on whether she was a victim of a crime or if the disappearance was self-caused, it might affect people's willingness to help and their interest in the case. A mysterious disappearance of a woman who is seen as a damsel in distress, needing saving from a man – or another

villain in the story – seems to intrigue the wider public much more than a disappearance of a woman who went missing due to what is often seen as one's own fault, meaning a substance abuse problem or not being happy with her life, even though in an ideal world in both cases it would be important to find the person. It could be due to this that Johnson's case did not get publicity in national media until her case was used as an example of MMIW.

In summary, the statements from Johnson's family illustrate to the recipient the emotional stress the family is experiencing due to the disappearance of Johnson and thus, seek to emotionally appeal to the public. The statements also provide some information on the circumstances of the disappearance, as it is stated that Johnson was not acting herself because she was distancing herself from her family and therefore, establish that Johnson went missing on odd circumstances. The statements from the family, as well as the overall message of the article also appeal to people's emotions by highlighting the unfair treatment of missing and murdered Indigenous women which also increases the newsworthiness of the story due to its timeliness in the wave of Petito's disappearance. Additionally, the statements from the authorities in the second article also point to the weirdness of the circumstances of Johnson's disappearance, indicating that Johnson being a victim of a crime is a possibility, while still speculating that perhaps she disappeared due to reasons which some might consider to be her own fault and which could diminish the public's interest in the case.

5. Discussion of results

The aim of the study was to examine the news coverage of missing persons cases to evaluate if and how the articles of the missing people Gabby Petito, Jashyah Moore, Miya Marcano, and Mary Johnson differ in terms of themes, language and imagery. More specifically, the research question the analysis sought to answer is how the missing person is depicted and if the missing persons' race, social status, age, and appearance are represented in these depictions as well and how the need for public attention of the case is manifested in the news articles.

Firstly, before answering the research question more specifically, it is important to note again the massive amount of media attention the case of Gabby Petito received. When compared to the news coverage of the other cases, the disparity is clearly seen. It should also be added that although searching extensively, a missing persons case of a non-White woman with similar news coverage in comparable scale to that of the case of Petito could not be found on *CNN* or other United States national news outlets. The difference in the amount of attention the analyzed cases received is seen in the analysis in almost every possible way; the articles focusing on Gabby Petito are much longer, include more statements from the Petito family and the authorities as well as discuss the circumstances of the disappearance, the investigation, and her background to a greater extent than any of the other cases. This is also reflected in the results of the analysis which I will discuss in this section first by focusing on the first part of the question: how is the missing person depicted and how the missing persons' race, social status, age, and appearance are represented in the depiction.

In order to examine the depictions and if the mentioned aspects which are often linked to MWWS are represented in the articles, the imagery as well as the language and themes of the articles were thoroughly evaluated based on the methodology presented prior to the analysis. Slakoff and Fradella (2019) find in their study that Black women and girls were significantly more likely to have their legitimate employment mentioned in the news coverage of their cases which might be an attempt to humanize the missing women and to illustrate them as productive members of society (p. 89). Interestingly, in the analyzed articles of the present study only the social status of Petito was highlighted. Moore and Marcano's social class was only indicated through mentioning where they live and in Marcano's case, stating that she lived and worked at the same apartment complex where she went missing from. In the articles focusing on the case of Johnson, much more implications towards her social status were made such as the references to her living situation, not owning a car, and living on a reservation. However, all these indications towards the women's social statuses

remain in the prior knowledge and interpretation of the recipient and no direct links are made in the articles itself. Similarly to the other three cases, Petito's social status was not directly mentioned in the text of the articles but it is heavily represented in the depiction of her through the imagery and the embedded video. The articles highlight the picturesque, adventurous, and trendy influencer lifestyle that Petito was living. However, how this differs from the finding of Slakoff and Fradella's (2019) study of the mentioning of the employment illustrating that the person is a productive member of the society, the data shows that Petito's lifestyle, job, and social status is emphasized in the imagery and themes of the article in order to depict the case in a scandalous manner, highlighting the mysterious and dramatic elements of the case. In other words, the case is presented in a scandalized manner through contrasting the seemingly perfect and happy life of a successful White couple shown on social media to the darker layer underneath which is highlighted through visual elements of the video and description of the case as a "mysterious disappearance of an Instagram adventurer" (Alonso et al., 2021, Sep 16).

Furthermore, the analysis focused on how the missing person's age was represented in the news articles. In the articles focusing on the cases of Marcano and Johnson, their ages are mentioned in a typical manner for news articles and the themes of the articles do not emphasize their ages. In the articles of Petito, age is more underlined through referring to Petito twice as a "young woman" (Moshtaghian et al., 2021, Sep 16). Therefore, the age is not highlighted in the articles but does support the earlier mentioned depiction of a young adventurous woman. In contrast to the other cases, in the articles focusing on the case of Moore, her age is a central theme as the narrative of the articles relies heavily on Moore being a 14-year-old girl and thus, emphasizes her being in a very vulnerable position even though not necessarily a victim of a crime. According to Slakoff and Fradella (2019), the age of the missing person affects significantly the story themes of the news coverage of missing children as they are more likely to be described as innocent which, of course, is not surprising as innocence and childhood are frequently linked in Western culture (p. 90). Interestingly, however, the analysis of the present study suggests that Moore's 'innocence' or a depiction of her as a 'good girl' is stressed through the mother's statements. As stated previously, this supports the claims that the positive characteristics of women and girls of minorities are emphasized in order for them to not be perceived through the stereotypes associated with the minority to which they belong (Neely, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, I argue that in Moore's case, the depiction of her as a good girl who likes spending time at home is emphasized in order for her not to be perceived as a runaway, as is often the case with children of minorities and which might diminish the attention the case receives (Moss, 2019, p. 752).

In addition to social status and age, the analysis evaluates how the person's appearance is represented in the news articles. In the scholarly and commentary discussion on MWWS, it is often stated that the more attractive the missing person is the more likely their case is to receive attention (e.g. Sommers, 2016). Therefore, in the analysis it was evaluated if this is manifested in the articles on these four women. However, the analysis conducted suggests that the missing persons' appearance is mentioned seemingly for identification purposes so that possible eyewitnesses would report possible leads to the authorities. This is seen in the articles focusing on the cases of Petito, Marcano, and Johnson as their description is mentioned in relation to the authorities and the family pleading for any information to be reported and the descriptions being very specific, focusing on characteristics and details based on which the women might be recognized. For example, describing what the women were possibly wearing around the time of their disappearances, their height, weight as well as hair and eye color and tattoos the women have. However, such depiction of Moore was not included, even though when comparing articles published about her case on other news outlets, such information has been available during the time of publishing the *CNN* articles, but due to the limitations of the study it is unclear why such convention of news coverage of missing persons cases was excluded from the articles focusing on Moore's case. Nonetheless, determining how persons' appearance and attractiveness influences the news coverage of missing persons cases is a difficult task due to the abstractness of the concept, even though psychological research has determined the existence of "the attractiveness effect" in variety of contexts, meaning that attractive people receive certain privileges in the society (Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011, p. 441). Due to such bias having been detected in the media and in other aspects of society the claims of scholars and commentators of the influence of the missing persons' attractiveness would not be surprising. However, in order for this to be examined further in this study, a focus group should be studied which could not be conducted in the scope of this study.

Furthermore, the missing persons' appearance is naturally also represented in the pictures included in the articles, which similarly to the written description seem to be included for identification purposes. What should be noted about the pictures, however, is that they seem to also support the depiction of the missing person presented in the articles. In the case of Gabby Petito, the included pictures further highlight the depiction of a young adventurous woman, as she is pictured spending time in nature, exploring, and doing different activities (e.g. image 1: pictured sandboarding; image 4: pictured in nature). Additionally, in contrast to the articles' strong depiction of Petito as a person and her life, the articles shed very little light on what Marcano's life was like prior to her disappearance. Therefore, the picture included in the articles of Marcano, is the only representation

of her as a person, in which she looks luminous and smiling widely, creating a depiction of a happy, beautiful young woman. This depiction, however, is not supported in the other themes discussed in the articles.

Additionally, the missing persons race is often mentioned in relation to the depiction of their appearance and is naturally also represented in the pictures included. However, the race of the missing persons is not otherwise highlighted in the articles of *Petito* and *Marcano*. In contrast, in the articles focusing on the cases of *Johnson* and *Moore* the race is a central theme as in both the known bias of MWWS and MMIW is used as a leverage to get publicity to their cases. As stated, this increases the newsworthiness of the stories through timeliness, as the topic became current again in the wave of *Gabby Petito's* disappearance and the sensationalism of it (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 42). In *Moore's* case, this is represented through the statements from the city officials who seek to appeal to people emotionally, pleading for public attention of the case. Similarly, in the articles focusing on the disappearance of *Johnson*, her family pleads to the authorities as well as the public stating that Native Women deserve the same treatment as White women. However, such references to their races do not extensively affect the depiction of them as people but emphasizes the vulnerable position of *Johnson* and *Moore* in the society. Especially in the case of *Johnson*, she is depicted as a representation and an example of all missing and murdered Indigenous women as the articles heavily focus on the societal issue.

This leads the discussion to the second part of the research question of how is the need for public attention of the case manifested in the news articles. In the analysis it was established that the need for public attention of the cases is conveyed through emotional appeals from the family of the missing person and the authorities in addition to the description of the circumstances of the disappearance and the investigation which is mostly recounted through the authorities' statements and convey to the recipient what is the missing persons' state of being in danger which creates and indicates urgency in the case.

It has been argued that in order for the missing persons case to receive attention, the person need 'media savvy' parents who appeal to the public's emotions (Liebler, 2010, p. 551). The importance of the family pleading for information from the public also manifests in the articles analyzed in the present study. In the articles focusing on the cases of *Petito*, *Moore*, and *Johnson*, the families are a salient voice. Especially in the articles focusing on the case of *Petito*, the family is heavily represented in the statements and the narrative of the story. In their statements the family stresses how emotionally

and physically draining their daughter's disappearance has been (e.g. "haven't been able to sleep or eat, and our lives are falling apart...") and highlight that the most important thing for them and the community is to find their daughter (e.g. "finding this girl is what matters... Anything else comes second to this"). This reflects the urgency the family feels in finding their daughter but also indicates the need for public attention as the family simultaneously pleads for information. Furthermore, the articles juxtaposing the very emotional reaction of the Petito family to the seemingly impassive and uncooperative statements from the Laundrie's side stir audiences emotions. All the information provided in the articles imply the guiltiness of Laundrie despite some of the objective statements from the authorities and based on the public discussion as well as people camping out at the Laundrie home seeking to pressure the family to talk, their unwillingness to cooperate and take a stance on the case enraged people. Arbaoui et al. (2020) conceptualize sensationalism as the characteristics of the news which "arouse audiences emotionally" and in those characteristics they distinguish three categories of which one is a storytelling perspective in which emotional testimonies are given in order to influence on the recipients processing of the news (p. 302). Therefore, arguably the family's emotional statements aimed at the Laundries in part influenced the sensationalism of the case and the massive public attention. However, in order to fully determine the reasons for the responses of the public it would need to be studied more extensively and is something to consider in future studies.

What also arguably influenced the enraged response of the public and also indicated need for the public's attention and Petito's state of being in danger was the articles emphasizing the physical altercation of Petito and Laundrie prior to Petito's disappearance. Through the emphasis of this certain previous event of the disappearance, the articles highlighted Petito's position as a victim of Brian Laundrie. It was determined in the analysis that one way the authorities statements were used to enhance the image of Petito as a victim was through 'manipulative silences,' which according to Huckin (2002), is a common feature of journalism and in short means that some relevant information is purposefully concealed from the recipient (p. 353). I argue that such manipulative silence is presented in the articles focusing on the case of Gabby Petito when discussing the physical altercation between Petito and Laundrie, as the articles both exclude the fact that Petito was the one "who struck first," even though the information was available to the journalist on the police report as well as he body camera footage of the aftermath of the altercation taken by the police (Rose, 2022, Jan 13). What is meant is not that the articles should have emphasized Petito as the aggressor in the situation or that she could not have been a victim of Laundrie in her disappearance, but by leaving out this small piece of information from the statements of the authorities, the article furthers and highlights the impression of Petito's victimhood as the recipient is left to make their own interpretations of the

situation based on other information provided in the articles which indicate guiltiness of Laundrie. Additionally, by including the police description of Petito as confused and emotional highlights the impression of Petito having been the victim in the situation and as a ‘damsel in distress’ as she is described to have been in vulnerable state of mind at the time. Therefore, I argue that the emphasis of the altercation in the articles, the description of Petito as ‘confused and emotional’ and the omission of some of the information in the police report furthers the impression of Petito as a ‘damsel in distress’ in part plays into the sensationalism of the case and the public attention which is only strengthened by the very emotional statements from her family, as discussed earlier. In the other cases, such manipulative silences could not be determined based on the available resources for this study. However, it is again something that could be evaluated more specifically in future studies.

Although in previous studies (i.e. Liebler, 2010; Moss, 2019) and in public discussion it has been often stated that the amount of media coverage a missing person receives is connected to her qualifying as a damsel in distress which partially benefits the case due to the public attention, it should be noted that a damsel in distress is not necessarily a flattering term, as Liebler (2010) states that damsels are rarely the source of respect and the term is simultaneously sexist, patriarchal, and disempowering and for example, in medieval romances damsels are depicted as helpless, not necessarily intelligent and are in need of rescue by knights in shining armor (p. 559). Therefore, although the implicit depiction of Petito as such seemingly has benefited her case as it has been widely sensationalized and yielded results in solving the case, the negative connotations the term has should also be considered and the wider harm of White women and girls being represented as damsels in distress in the media. In discussion of the depiction of missing women and what seems to be in the center of MWWS is race, although other variables also mentioned in the discussion of this thesis such as social status, appearance, and age also seem to influence the missing woman’s qualification as such (Liebler, 2010, p. 557). Therefore, in the analysis it was also examined how the state of being danger, urgency and need for public attention was manifested in the articles focusing on the disappearances of Moore, Marcano, and Johnson.

As discussed earlier regarding the cases of Moore and Johnson, the argument of the known racial disparity in the news coverage of missing people is used to appeal to the public in order for the cases to receive public attention. This plea is conveyed to the recipient through the statements from the authorities in Moore’s case, as Prosecutor Stephens is quoted stating that the missing persons’ cases of Black and brown little girls demand similar attention as those of White women and girls (Studley, 2021, Nov 11). Similarly, in the articles discussing the case of Johnson, the family states that missing

and murdered Indigenous women need the same attention as the cases of White women receive (Kaur, 2021, Sep 30). Therefore, in both cases the statements seek to convince the public that these cases need public attention by appealing to their emotions as they refer to the unfair treatment of minorities. Additionally, in Moore's case her age is highlighted, conveying to the recipient that she is vulnerable due to her age, although also at the same time Moore's mother's statements function to convince the reader that she did not run away, due to this possibly diminishing the attention the law enforcement and the public would pay to the case. Nevertheless, in the articles focusing on the cases of Moore and Johnson, they are not as readily indicated as victims as Petito is, although in both cases it is indicated through the statements from the families and authorities as well as through the recounting of circumstances of disappearance and the investigation that there is a possibility that they have been met with foul play. Furthermore, based on the statements from the authorities and the families, in Moore and Johnson's cases the articles arguably highlight and seek to convince the reader of these cases needing and deserving attention, whereas in the case of Petito it was a default, as the articles merely needed to depict her as being a victim and her family to describe the emotional stress the disappearance has caused them.

In contrast to the other cases, in the articles focusing on the case of Marcano, there are no statements from the family, although at the time, based on other coverage of the case by national media outlets, the family had given statements regarding the case in press conferences. In closer examination of the articles, it is notable how the emotional aspect and humanization of Marcano is lacking from the articles, arguably weakening the newsworthiness and thus possibly decreasing the attention people are to give to the case. Additionally, through the lack of the emotional statements from the family, there was also less urgency and need for public attention indicated in the articles. The articles did include a statement from Sheriff Mina in which he reiterated that Miya is still missing and leads from the public are needed, the message was not as strong as in the articles of Petito, or even Moore and Johnson. As stated in the analysis, this shows a disparity in the news coverage of Marcano and Petito's cases, as they were similar in the way that the responsible person for the disappearance was known but the person was still missing, but only the case of Petito attracted a media frenzy and massive amounts of attention.

In summary, the aim of the analysis was to evaluate if and how the articles of the four missing women differ in terms of themes, language, and imagery through answering the research question of how is the missing person depicted and if their race, social status, age, and appearance are represented in the depictions and how the need for public attention of the case is manifested. The results of the analysis

suggest that Petito and her case fit the trope of a missing person to be scandalized in the media. In the articles, she was depicted as a young, adventurous and trendy influencer living her dream life traveling around the United States but underneath the picturesque portrayal of her life, there was a darker layer underneath in which she was underlined as a victim of domestic assault. This depiction advanced the scandalization of her case through dramatization and arguably increased the massive public interest her case received. In addition, this depiction of her as a victim and the urgency in finding her was enhanced by the emotional statements of the family and the informative and emotional statements of authorities' which both further indicated the dramatic element of her case, meaning that she was a victim of a man who supposedly loved her and now, as she is missing, is not cooperating with the police.

Such depictions and dramatizations were not seen of Moore, Marcano, or Johnson which can already be noted from the significantly smaller media attention their cases received and the length of the articles. The case of Marcano was very similar to that of Petito, but the themes, language, and imagery in the articles of her case did not highlight similar urgency in finding her or need for public attention as the articles of Petito's case did. Additionally, whereas Petito's life and characteristics were more extensively discussed and illustrated in the articles, the news coverage of Marcano's disappearance was very one-dimensional. Additionally, in the cases of Moore and Johnson their lives and characteristics were discussed further but especially the depiction of Moore as a homebody and a good girl seeks to highlight to the recipient that she should not be perceived as a runaway, reflecting the problem of MWWS that in order for her case to be distinguished as 'worthy' of attention, her positive characteristics are reiterated in order for her not to be perceived through the stereotypes assigned by the society to the minority to which she belongs. Furthermore, as the articles of Moore and especially Johnson highlight the issue of MWWS and MMIW, they retrieve relevancy from the timeliness of the topic, which raises the question if the cases, especially Johnson's would have received national attention on their own, as did the case of Petito.

6. Conclusion

During the year 2021, the discussion on Missing White Woman Syndrome was once again surfaced in the traditional as well as online media first due to the disappearance and murder of Sarah Everard and then Gabby Petito. Both homicides were tragic and in their own right were followed with discussion on violence against women as well as the ability of law enforcement to evaluate and act on situations of domestic violence. However, at the same time as Petito and Everard became the faces for the public discussion on the dangers women face in their daily lives, many other disappearances of women and men of different races and backgrounds went unnoticed. This further highlighted the issue of MWWS: once again the disappearances and homicides of White women were overly sensationalized in the media and public discussion while the needed attention to other missing persons cases was lacking. Nevertheless, the discussion on MWWS which followed the media frenzy of Petito and Everard did also prompt and steer the focus to some cases which arguably otherwise would not have received the news coverage and which is also reflected in the results of this study.

The abovementioned discussion also inspired the aim of this study which was to examine the news coverage of missing persons cases on *CNN* in order to evaluate if and how the articles of missing people Gabby Petito, Jashyah Moore, Miya Marcano, and Mary Johnson differ in terms of themes, language and imagery by focusing on analyzing the depiction of the missing person and if race, social status, age, and appearance were represented in these depictions as well as to analyze how the need for public attention of the case is manifested in the news articles. The analysis was conducted with the analytical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse analysis, which allow for the critical examination of the articles not only linguistically but also visually and support the examination of the news articles as representing the social context in which they were created. In other words, it was considered how the multifaceted phenomenon of MWWS was manifested in the articles but also how it is maintained by the news coverage.

The results of this study, which were discussed further in the previous section, provide further knowledge on the phenomenon of MWWS. The findings indicate that the cases of White women are not only sensationalized through the news organizations' massive and constant news coverage of the story but also in the content of the news articles, meaning the language, themes, and imagery. This was seen in the analysis as Petito's seemingly perfect and happy life was highlighted in the imagery, themes and language of the news articles and juxtaposed to the tragedy which she faced. This depiction was manifested through editing and visual elements of the videos embedded in the news

articles and the emotional statements from her family as well as the discussion on the circumstances of the disappearance and the investigation in which the guiltiness of Laundrie was highlighted. Furthermore, the articles positioning the very emotional family advocating for their daughter against an impassive family seemingly protecting their son from the law enforcement added a dramatic effect to the story, which arguably enraged the public wanting for justice. Therefore, the results of this study show that the news coverage of the case of Petito has similar traits of sensationalism as, for example, that of Natalee Holloway.

In contrast, the coverage of the other three cases was much slimmer, and similar theatrical and dramatic effects were not used, or were used to a lesser extent. The results show that the coverage of the disappearance of Marcano was more one-dimensional, and the articles did not indicate similar urgency in finding her, as there were no statements from her family. This highlights the importance of the emotional aspect of news coverage in such cases and supports the claims made by previous research in which it has been stated that the missing person needs ‘media savvy’ parents who advocate for their case in the media. The results of the study also support previous research which has established that children of minorities are more often labeled as runaways and their cases do not garner the same urgency as those of White children and that the positive characteristics of missing persons of color are often emphasized so that they would not be perceived through the stereotypes assigned to their group by the society. This was represented in the news articles focusing on the case of Moore in which the statements of the authorities and the family functioned to convince the public that one should care about the case and that Moore is not a runaway.

Furthermore, the results of the study show that in the themes of the news articles focusing on the cases of Johnson and Moore, newsworthiness was established through discussion on the issue of MWWS as well as MMIW. This was prevalent especially in the articles of Johnson’s case in which Johnson was used as a representation of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Thus, indicating that the case of Johnson was not newsworthy on its own, without the societal commentary, whereas Petito’s case was. It is, however, important to note that although based on the results of the analysis Petito and her case was in a privileged position in contrast to Moore, Marcano, and Johnson, and certain public attention is often needed in order for the investigation to yield results, the news organizations overly sensationalizing the cases of White women in a theatrical manner can also be very harmful to the women, their families, and the investigation.

Although the results of the study provide further discussion and empirical research on the phenomenon of MWWS and support many claims scholars have made on the racial disparity of news coverage of missing people, there are some limitations to this study. Firstly, it should be noted that the scope of this thesis is not broad and is only limited to the four analyzed cases. However, this study provides base for future research of the themes, language and imagery of news articles on missing persons cases. Secondly, in the analysis and results of the study the public's possible reaction to the news coverage was considered, as it is assumed that the public interest of the case is reflected in the amount of news coverage and vice versa. Additionally, the response of the public was also evaluated based on previous research of the topic and other public discussion surrounding the case of Petito. However, to fully determine and research further what is the public's reaction to certain themes, language choices, and imagery of the news coverage, public response should be researched further, for example by examining discourse on social media or surveying a focus group. The present study also focused much on the racial disparity of news coverage of missing persons cases while not discussing the gender bias of said news coverage which, to my best knowledge, has not been extensively researched especially in terms of the content of the news articles. Therefore, I will conclude this thesis with some suggestions of future research of which the first is to study the public's response to the news coverage more specifically and second, to research if and how the gender bias is manifested in the language, themes, or imagery of the news coverage of missing people. Further avenues of research might be, for example, the representation of domestic violence in media as well as how victimhood is constructed in the narration of the stories.

References

Primary sources

- Alonso, M., Sanchez, R. & Romine, T. (2021, Sep 16). Gabby Petito's family makes plea for information about missing daughter. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/16/us/gabby-petito-missing-fathers-plea/index.html>
- Elassar, A. (2021, Sep 18). FBI offers \$10,000 reward for information on the disappearance of Native American woman. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/18/us/mary-johnson-davis-missing-tulalip-fbi-10000-reward/index.html>
- Kaur, H. (2021, Sep 23). Mary Johnson, an Indigenous woman, went missing nearly a year ago. While the FBI recently offered a reward, activists say that's not enough. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/23/us/mary-johnson-missing-indigenous-women-crisis-cec/index.html>
- Moshtaghian, A., Alsharif, M. & Maxouris, C. (2021, Sep 16). Police looking for missing woman Gabby Petito ask for her boyfriend's cooperation. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/15/us/gabby-petito-missing/index.html>
- Riess, R. (2021, Sep 28). A Florida woman is missing and a man police were looking for appears to have killed himself. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/27/us/florida-missing-woman-miya-marcano/index.html>
- Riess, R. & Almasy, S. (2021, Sep 30). FBI joins search for Miya Marcano, who has been missing in Florida for nearly a week. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/30/us/florida-missing-woman-miya-marcano-fbi/index.html>
- Romine, T. & Haring, A. (2021, Nov 5). A 14-year-old left home to go to a local deli more than 20 days ago. She hasn't been seen since. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/05/us/jashyah-moore-missing-new-jersey/index.html>
- Studley, L. (2021, Nov 11). \$20,000 reward offered for 14-year-old who vanished nearly a month ago. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/10/us/jashyah-moore-missing-reward/index.html>

Secondary sources

- Alfonseca, K. (2021, Nov 5). Search continues for missing 14-year-old in New Jersey. *ABC News*.
<https://abcnews.go.com/US/search-continues-missing-14-year-jersey/story?id=80994378>
- Arbaoui, B., De Swert, K. & van der Brug, W. (2020). Sensationalism in news coverage: A comparative study in 14 television systems. *Communication research*, 47(2), 299-320.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650216663364>
- Bednarek, M. & Caple, H. (2012). *News discourse*. London: Continuum.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2012). The invisible weight of whiteness: the racial grammar of everyday life in contemporary America, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(2), 173-194,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.613997>
- Burke, M. (2021, Nov 1). N.J. teen Jashyah Moore was stabbed, beaten by mother before running away, complaint alleges. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nj-teen-jashyah-moore-was-stabbed-beaten-mother-running-away-complaint-rcna5691>
- Canadian Centre for Information on Missing Adults. (2012). *Guidelines When Working with the Media* | CCIMA. Retrieved April 28, 2022, from
<https://missingpersonsinformation.ca/resources/guidelines-when-working-with-the-media/>
- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2nd edition). Routledge: London. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>
- Flowerdew, J. & Richardson, J. E. (2018). Introduction. In J. Flowerdew & J.E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315739324>
- Fortin, J. (2020, August 28). Sarah Turney Sought Justice on TikTok. Now Her Father Is Charged With Homicide. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/26/us/alissa-turney-update.html>

- Junttola, S. (2019). *Benefits of whiteness?: a case study on missing white woman syndrome in news discourse* [Bachelor's thesis, University of Oulu]. Jultika-julkaisuarkisto.
<http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:oulu-201912143279>
- Ledin, P. & Machin, D. (2018). Multimodal critical discourse analysis. In J. Flowerdew & J.E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315739324>
- Liebler, C. M. (2010). Me(di)a Culpa?: The 'Missing White Woman Syndrome' and Media Self Critique. C. M. Liebler. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 3(4), 549-565.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2010.01085.x>
- Min, S., & Feaster, J. (2010). Missing Children in National News Coverage: Racial and Gender Representations of Missing Children Cases. *Communication Research Reports*, 27(3), 207-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824091003776289>
- Moss, J. L. (2019). The forgotten victims of missing white woman syndrome: An examination of legal measures that contribute to the lack of search and recovery of missing black girls and women. *William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice*, 3(25), 737-762.
<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmjowl/vol25/iss3/9>
- National Congress of American Indians. (2022). *Demographics | NCAI*. Retrieved April 17, 2022, from <https://www.ncai.org/about-tribes/demographics>
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. (2020). *Guidelines for Utilizing the Media when Investigating a Missing Person*. Retrieved April 28, 2022, from <https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/ncmec-utilizing-the-media.pdf>
- Pereira, I. (2021, Sep 28). Miya Marcano's family search for clues for 19-year-old's whereabouts. *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/family-missing-19-year-miya-marcano-hoping-safe/story?id=80278093>
- Riel-Johns, J. (2016). *Understanding Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada*.

Lavell-Harvard, D. M., & Brant, J. (Eds.). *Forever Loved: Exposing the Hidden Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada*. Demeter Press.

Rose, A. (2022, Jan 13). Independent investigator recommends Utah officers who stopped Gabby Petito and Brian Laundrie be placed on probation. *CNN*.
<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/12/us/gabby-petito-brian-laundrie-moab-police-report/index.html>

Simmons, C. & Woods, J. (2015). The Overrepresentation of White Missing Children in National Television News. *Communication Research Reports*, 32(3), 239-245.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2015.1052898>

Slakoff, D.C. & Fradella, H.F. (2019). Media Messages Surrounding Missing Women and Girls: The “Missing White Woman Syndrome” and Other Factors that Influence Newsworthiness. *Criminology, criminal justice, law & society*, 20(3), 80-102.

Sommers, Z. (2016). Missing White Woman Syndrome: an Empirical Analysis of Race and Gender Disparities in Online News Coverage of Missing Persons. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 106(2), 275-314.

Stillman, S. (2007). 'The missing white girl syndrome': disappeared women and media activism. *Gender & Development*, 15(3), 491-502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070701630665>

Suleyman, C. (2016, Apr 26). There’s an epidemic of missing people of colour who aren’t photogenic enough for us to find. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/there-s-an-epidemic-of-missing-children-of-colour-who-aren-t-photogenic-enough-to-find-a6989666.html>

The Red Road: The Issue of Native American Poverty. (2022). The Red Road. Retrieved April 17, 2022, from <https://theredroad.org/issues/native-american-poverty/>

Van Dijk, T. A. (1988). Structures of international news. *News analyses: Case studies of international and national news in the press* (pp. 31-133). Hillsdale, N. J.: L. Erlbaum.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & communication*, 1(1), 91-112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307071986>

Waismel-Manor, I. & Tsfati, Y. (2011). Why Do Better-Looking Members of Congress Receive More Television Coverage? *Political Communication*, 28(4), 440-463. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2011.617719>