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A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of the construction of people of colour (POC) as criminals in UK and US print media following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests

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ABSTRACT

Around 2,000 "thugs" were present and over 150 arrests were made in London during protests around the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in 2020. Publicly available data, e.g., newspapers and blog posts, were used to conduct a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis in this study. Language was conceptualised and constructed to depict POC as more prone to adopting aggressive means; findings indicated an inherent belief that ethnic minorities possess a predisposition to criminality. Rhetorical constructions in the reviewed articles indicate practical implications, including the emergence of "fake news", but hopes to influence UK and US policy evaluations on print media.

Introduction

"Violence is social when it is directed against an individual or his property, solely or primarily because of his membership in a social category" (Grimshaw, 1962, p. 3), such as those identifiable as persons of color (POC). Firstly, racism references dominant groups in society who exercise feigned superiority over minorities (Bremner, 2023; Rattansi, 2020; Winant, 2020); whereas prejudices are baseless preconceived opinions that influence on societal interactions (Paluck et al., 2021; Vala, 2013). These subconscious or conscious preconceptions may affect a variety of factors, such as sex, race, and age. In light of this, the conscious decision has been made to use the terms "people of colour" and "Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters" interchangeably, due to their equivalency being present in relevant UK and US print media for public consumption. The combination of individual prejudices affect broader social practices (Brondolo et al., 2012; Winant, 2020), such as public opinion, policing, and the media which will be explored using a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA; Khan & MacEachen, 2021; Willig, 2012) approach to language

construction in newspaper articles under three themes: *diminished importance and distractions*, *segregation versus solidarity*, and *violence and anger*. Drawing on a social constructionist approach to FDA laid out by Willig (2012), the qualitative analysis examines social legitimacy (Khan & MacEachen, 2021) in newspapers through the lens of racial power imbalance in the UK and US society via print media following the 2020 BLM protests.

In terms of criminality and race, the root of most known protests has been identified as perceived or actual inter-racial friction, including bodily harm, police brutality, harassment, or interference; or historically, violating segregation rulings (Holdo & Bengtsson, 2020; Lieberson, 1966). Race-orientated protests are evident across the globe in ethnically diverse countries, due to racial inequality. Due to their vast societal impact, this area has become a focal point of study for scholars in psycho-criminological and political spheres in attempting to identify cause, impacts, and resolutions (Berk et al., 2012). It has been said that public opinions on POC are influenced by colonialism (Cole, 2022; Young, 1995) and the media impacts public beliefs and attitudes (Happer & Philo, 2013), which establishes predispositions to accept unfavorable stories, beliefs, or rumors about racial minority groups. Thus, it can be argued that research is imperative in the development of programs to combat issues and community needs or wishes, therefore, social research is important in the advancement of sustainable communities (Buchanan et al., 2021; McLoughlin & Young, 2005).

Existing literature on social psychological theories of social stereotyping found a strong, positive, relationship between judgments of crime and punishment, but only for black perpetrators (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Petsko et al., 2022; W. A. Smith et al., 2011), resulting in the endorsement of negative stereotypes and viewing black suspects as guiltier, more deserving of punishment, and more likely to recidivate. However, differing research has found black people are underrepresented as both victims and perpetrators (Dixon & Williams, 2015). Using the Guard Dog Theory of Media Coverage (GDMC), which details the media acting as a protector for groups with sufficient power and influence to control public domains (Donohue et al., 1995; Van Dalen, 2021). Thus, it may be argued this US-based study is positively impacted by election of the first black President, as such explicit or implicit racism are unlikely to be evident due to presidential endorsements. Alternatively, the predominately Republican states, such as Texas and Louisiana (Weigel, 2020), may be more likely to support any prejudices, due to stereotypical racism associated with Republican political affiliations. This theory might also be present at other key points in time, for example, the way black individuals were portrayed in environmental disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (Stivers, 2007) as thieves of the tragedy, where white families were identified as resourceful (J. D. Johnson et al., 2008; K. A. Johnson et al., 2011), highlighting the racist stereotyping present in media representations. Additional research

has shown that black people are continually portrayed using stereotypical imagery to this day in more mainstream media (Jean et al., 2022), persistently affecting the impact on and perception of young black individuals. These findings highlight racial stereotyping in the media, with positive and negative outcomes. Therefore, it can be argued these figures of representation are not adumbrative of UK portrayals of individuals of different ethnic backgrounds due to the investigation being on US aspects of crime in the media.

Research suggests that fear of crime is worsened by exaggerated and distorted realities reported by the media (Aleem et al., 2021; Näsi et al., 2021), such as the endorsement of racial stereotypes of criminality by the media encouraging a baseless fear of POC and different cultures. Those that consume at least 4 hours of media a day (known as heavy users) are more likely to develop a worldview that is close to one developed by televisions and newspapers than what is actually real (Aleem et al., 2021; Callanan, 2012). Through the advancement technology since the time of these studies, it may be said that most of the general public are heavy users due to easily accessible media. However, this may be attributed to those who are more impressionable by fear being attracted to certain forms of media, such as tabloids or dramatized television shows (Callanan, 2012). Social conditioning from media and other sources combined with illusory correlations could influence beliefs of black predispositions to crime (Hamilton, 2015; M. R. Smith & Alpert, 2007). Consequently, fear of crime reported in the media can lead mass societal fear of ethnic minorities. It should be noted, however, that a direct link between the two cannot be assumed without credible research evidence.

A lack of cohesion between the public and ethnic minorities may be accredited to entrenched segregation between communities, combined with a perceived failure of authorities to correct the causes of racial division (Cantle, 2001; Joseph-Salisbury et al., 2021). Bowling and Phillips (2002) stated POC are "no more involved in crime than others" (p.78) but identified three reasons for public concern. Categorized by conflict between police and black communities; police ability to produce more statistics about POC and crime; and finally, media depictions of criminality, creating strong links between race and crime (Auty & Liebling, 2020; McMullin & Ogmundson, 2005). Overall, this creates conflict in the community, and an abrasive atmosphere concerning race and crime, which may result in outbursts of emotion in the forms of protests.

Theories of anonymity in crowds, such as the Deindividuation Theory or Social Identity Theory (SIDE; Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003; Templeton & Neville, 2020), can contribute to understanding the violent behaviors in the protests of 2020, specifically those detailed in the UK and US print media. The former is defined by losing socialized individual identity and engaging in antisocial behaviors (Li, 2010; Templeton & Neville, 2020). However, the latter highlights the importance of inter-groups, where direct confrontation occurs

between two groups during crowd events (Varghese & Thampi, 2021). Large groups provide a sense of anonymity that lessens personal responsibility for crowd behaviors (Templeton & Neville, 2020; Templeton et al., 2018; Zimbardo, 1970). Therefore, it can be argued POC who participate in violence during protests, such as the BLM protests, are not doing so because of a predisposition to aggression, but as a consequence of lost identity and reduced concern for social evaluation in light of social oppression and continual victimization of police brutality. In support of this, research has found individuals respond more antisocially to stimuli when protected by a crowd of anonymity, opposed to singularity (Festinger et al., 1952; Templeton & Neville, 2020; Templeton et al., 2018; Zimbardo et al., 1986). Differing research has found protester's behavior is not entirely spontaneous, they can be directly impacted by responses of police to their presence, and vice versa (Carter et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2023). Alternative to the idea of lost identity, it may be argued that intergroup cohesion can induce an increase or enforcement of one's identity (Bliuc et al., 2019), eliciting a reinvigorated sense of purpose in their designated community. Therefore, the BLM movement protests may not have intended violence, but precipitated acts of aggression through loss of identity or enforcement of such.

Following this, R. D. Johnson and Downing (1979) suggest anonymity does not have to result in aggression; rather normative expectations of individuals in a situation have more influence on behavior (McPhail, 2017; Vilanova et al., 2017). Moreover, Diener (1977) found that deindividuated groups, such as soldiers, police, or even BLM supporters could not be further anonymized (Vilanova et al., 2017). In theory, SIDE and the Deindividuation Theory agree that violence in crowds can be attributed to anonymity rather than an inherent tendency toward aggression (Festinger et al., 1952; Templeton & Neville, 2020; Templeton et al., 2018; Zimbardo, 1970); but in practice, this published predisposition toward aggression may be a product of racist stereotyping in media representations of the BLM protests than accurate reporting of events. It can be said that those who are violent during protests have done so because of their anonymity in a crowd, rather than a tendency toward aggression. In terms of the BLM protests in 2020, 93% of them remained peaceful (Beckett, 2020); SIDE details that the social group sets boundaries for acceptable behavior in the collective (Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003; Klein et al., 2007), and individuals are unlikely to stray from this. Therefore, violence and aggression resulting in criminality may not have originated from BLM members, but from those who have taken advantage of the anonymity in a crowd, of which this research seeks to understand the language used to construct these theories in real time.

Callanan (2012, 2021) states that those most impressionable by fear are more attracted to tabloid media, which are not required to report the truth (Nadkarni, 2011) and can exaggerate any events. Additionally, the current

abrasive atmosphere surrounding the topic of race and crime in police conflict (Auty & Liebling, 2020; Bowling & Phillips, 2002), ethnic underrepresentation (Dixon & Williams, 2015), and negative stereotype endorsements (Peffley et al., 1996; Petsko et al., 2022; W. A. Smith et al., 2011) might have exacerbated impressionability of the public on the matter. Existing research states a variety of inflammatory tactics are used in media discussions of the BLM movement (Leopold & Bell, 2017), which little attention paid to core issues of the community. Based on such research, an FDA method was employed to explore the construction of POC and criminality in the UK and US print media, so that a more in-depth understanding of public opinions may be understood from a media perspective. As race and crime are socially constructed discourses and the aim is to explore newspapers in the public domain, the social constructionist epistemological position outlined by Willig (2012) for FDA is most appropriate for this analysis.

Methods

Design and analytic approach

Taking a critical realism epistemological position within a social constructionist perspective, this study adopts a Foucauldian discourse analysis drawing on the ideas of Willig's (2012) stages of analysis, selected for the aim to investigate the construction of different worldviews via language use. Namely, (1) examine how POC are constructed throughout the data, (2) identify wider discourses within which different constructions exist, (3) identify the functions of such constructions, (4) identify the subject positions within discourses, (5) analyze implications for practice of the identified subject positions, and (6) analyze implications for subjectivity of those positions.

Data collection

Secondary data in the form of any type of article published in affiliation with newspapers (e.g., newspapers, Letter to the Editor, and comments on online news articles) was accessed via an internal UK university library database (underpinned by Elsevier, PubMed, and LexisNexis), organized by most relevant, in practice, this reflects the general public searching for news about the 2020 protests. This was achieved by inputting the following keywords, which related to racial profiling and the Black Lives Matter: BLM (2020) race, crime, protests. All newspaper articles had to be dated between the start of the protests (25th May 2020), and the beginning of data collection (1st March 2021). The initial search reaped 25 articles (59.8% tabloid, 40.2% broadsheet; 47.2% left, 52.8% right politically leaning; readership numbers ranging from 2.5 million to 10,000) of which FDA was conducted upon by

deep immersion into the data from a social constructionist epistemology; the final sample concluded of 6 extracts that the subsequent themes were most prevalent and poignant across. The final sample included center left, center right, far-left, and far-right politically leaning newspapers, with readership numbers ranging from 2.5 million to 16,000 in an effort to best represent the range presented in the initial sample.

Inspiration for research guidelines was taken from Granderson (2018) to develop parameters to prevent researcher biases to support the research aims. These include discussions of crime during the protests; disregard of legal specificities of victims of lawful murder; no explicit racist comments, words, or phrases; and, focus on the UK and US-based protests, any other countries will be disregarded. Whilst this manuscript only reviews newspaper articles, and in doing so introduces publication bias through neglecting accounts published in formats such as journal articles, books, and chapters, this approach allows for a more in-depth review and is further mitigated through sampling across multiple authors and newspaper publications.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was gained through the University of Derby ethics committee in the UK. Whiteman (2012) acknowledges that online identities, such as authors of social media posts, blogs, and newspaper articles, should still be regarded as people, and therefore the same privacy rights awarded to them, and authors names have been omitted.

Reflexive summary

The research team aims to present and analyze the sources of data as accurately and fairly as possible. At the time of writing, the first author was an undergraduate student of psychology at a UK institution with interests in the psychological, social, and political effects of racism on the individual and on the general public. Moreover, author MN has expertise in social and cultural psychology and Zimbabwean cultures, and DF has an academic background in forensic psychology more broadly. The analysis has benefitted from including different perspectives of the racial inequality by shedding light on the emerging themes that can be reflective of the UK and US public opinions on the protests.

Findings & discussion

Three themes appeared most commonly and prominently from data immersion and coding in the language used to construct a POC as predisposed to criminality in the US and UK print media. Themes explored in this section include the role of *diminished importance and distractions* that

detract from the severity of either side of the BLM protests; it highlights how language is used in the media to depict other sections of news as more important, averting the reader's attention from the importance of the BLM movement's argument following the unlawful death of a black male. The second theme, *segregation versus solidarity* shows two depictions of POC in the media, language has been used to construct them as both companionable and isolated from other ethnicities in society. Finally, *violence and anger* explores how language is used to invoke a framework of emotive responses toward the behaviors of individuals affiliated with the BLM movement, both criminal and not.

Diminished importance and distractions

This theme alludes to distractions to avert reader's attention from real issues and debates to something considered more important. In terms of this research, authors are using distractions to avert attentiveness from the issue of race in the UK and US, to something else, or reducing the importance.
Extract 1 (*A3*):

(1) " . . . Stay home and abide by coronavirus lockdown and social distancing
(2) rules . . . We understand why people want to express their concerns and
(3) have worked hard to keep people safe . . . A number of people have not
(4) followed these [COVID-19] conditions, putting officers, and others' safety
(5) at risk."

(*The Mirror 13/06/2020*)

This extract is taken from a UK newspaper in the height of the COVID-19 lockdown where safety restrictions were imposed to limit the spread of the virus, including the prevention of gatherings of over six people. Therefore, it may be said that this extract uses COVID-19 restrictions to diminish the importance, and passion, involved in the protests. The author invokes a discourse of fear, in anxiety toward COVID-19 and repercussions of mixing; coupled with anger discourses, characterized by inducing resentment toward protestors resulting in a spike of COVID cases. A second wave did come in the period after the protests (Lopez, 2020), Neyman and Dalsey (2020) found a significant rise in cases in cities with protests, but they were small in magnitude and likely attributed to a difference in population sizes. Arguably, the second wave was due to fewer people following mask mandates and increases in large assemblies (Maragakis, 2020), but also unintentional gatherings, such as multigenerational households, prisons, and care facilities (GOV.uk, 2023; Mahase, 2021).

Despite this evidence, the extract positions BLM protestors as *criminals* and *irresponsible*, due to involvement in large gatherings at a volatile time. Furthermore, the public is positioned as *weak* and *vulnerable* by the virus, therefore COVID-19 holds the power in this extract. As such, the BLM protesters are used as *scapegoats* to take blame for the violence, and spike in COVID-19 cases. The author uses fear of the virus to enforce adherence to coronavirus restrictions, but also to invoke anger toward those who are not doing so, as well as giving the UK government power in ability to enforce national lockdown measures. The use of belittling language such as "express concerns" also downplays the importance of the protests. In response to behavior outside of the societal norms, moral panic may spread (Thompson, 1998). Following the principles of such, the extract suggests media has put the threat of increased COVID-19 cases into an easily accessible form for the public, facilitating the spread of anxiety associated with the gathering of protesters (Garland, 2008).

Overall, fear of the protesters and the increase of COVID-19 cases as a direct result of gatherings are likely to influence the public's perceptions of POC. Individuals are more likely to see the BLM protestors as *criminals* due to them breaking COVID restrictions, but deters attention from the root of their movement. The author in this extract has used distraction techniques to ignore the aim of furthering equality, justice, and diversity in the developed world.

Extract 2 (*A22*):

(1) "I have watched with disgust the footage of rioters targeting beautiful,
(2) noble horses, throwing brick[s], fireworks and bicycles at them. Certainly
(3) no decent human being would do this . . . Animals are worth a life too. So
(4) why target them[?]"

(Swindon Advertiser 11/06/2020)

Initially, this extract explicitly distracts attention from the core arguments of "lawful murders," and rather, sheds light on the injured animals as a direct result; however, implicit exploration can show an inherent racial prejudice. This has been written by a member of the public and sent to their local newspaper, therefore the anecdotal elements may not be deemed reliable, or beliefs generalized, due to explicit perceptions of a single individual.

The language used can give the illusion of animals having equal power to humans in this extract, using the expression "animals are worth a life too," it is evident the means of protesting should apply to all life. However, the use of "targeting" positions the horses as *innocent victims* caught in the crossfire, but the author is also giving BLM the subject position of *scapegoats*, once again. Despite neglecting to name a particular party, extract *A22* focuses entirely on

anti-racist groups partaking in criminal activity during the protests and does not mention any other crowds that were known to be present (e.g., far-right protesters). Therefore, this extract is leaning toward the position of POC as *criminals* due to involvement in injuring the horses, despite it diminishing the deaths of POC due to lawful murder.

The words "beautiful, noble horses" links back to the heavy influence of horses in British culture, where horseshoes are tokens of good luck, and the animals were regularly ridden into battle (B. Johnson, 2015). In this case, horses are to be respected and treasured. However, historical depictions of POC tend to reference perceived likenesses to animals through aggression, hypersexuality, and violent behaviors (Hackman, 2016), where being animalistic is to be feared and punished. Research into the intersection between animals and POC points to the latter being personal possessions in slave trading, which highlights contemporary consequences (Boisson, 2019). Further interest in the topic has shown animal rights activists to compare the experiences of caged animals to the slave trade in the criticism animal treatment, but not POC. Hart (2014) found evaluations between the two experiences to be a comparative diminution of literal enslavement of black people, which links back to the original theme of diminishing the importance of black oppression. Taking into consideration that 55% of black American citizens are descended from West African ancestors bought as slaves (Salas et al., 2005), it may be said treatment of POC is similar, with regard to lawful murder. Animals were considered to be more important, which is reflected in society's acceptance of lawful murder, but to show anger and resentment at cruelty to animals is unacceptable. Everything considered, the writer of extract *A22* idolizes horses and opposes their injury after generations of devotion to them, while simultaneously likening POC to the aggression of animals, despite their history of oppression.

On the whole, this extract has used discourses of anger toward the BLM movement over the involvement of animals, specifically horses, in the protests. This has highlighted historical perceptions of enslaved POC, a legacy that continues to correlate ethnic minorities to barbarism and chaos (Olusoga, 2015), but also created an inherent love of animals but aversion toward POC. The injury of the former by the latter is used to diminish the importance of black oppression and distract from the protests.

Segregation vs. Solidarity

This theme highlights authors' use of language to separate the protesters, such as BLM and right wing, from the population; or they have been used to unite people in a show of solidarity. Extracts presented here show POC in both a positive and negative light in the media; these tactics may have been employed to show a belief in the values any of the groups advocate for, or to shun the violence and disruption.

Extract 3 (*A3*):

(1) "A white man alleged by the crowd to be a far-right protester was carried
(2) to safety by a black man as animosity was briefly set aside outside the
(3) station ... Pictures showed the white man clutching his head as the black
(4) man carried him over his shoulder ... "

(*The Mirror 13/06/2020*)

This extract explicitly highlights the theme by showing the camaraderie exhibited during the BLM protests of 2020. Therefore, the author juxtaposes the distortion and exaggeration of reality newspapers usually exhibit (Aleem et al., 2021; Näsi et al., 2021). Alternatively, there may be biases toward anti-racist groups, such as BLM, by positioning members as *saviours* and *protectors* against police violence.

Additionally, the author uses emotional discourses to align with BLM, or to question normative portrayal of POC as menacing (Peffley et al., 1996). Therefore, a moral discourse is employed to invoke sympathy for the "white man," who is positioned as *vulnerable* and *victimised*, where they are usually perceived as *superior*. Overall, from this it can be deduced that the "black man" in this extract holds power, specifically the moral high ground. Amid the "animosity" between the two groups, solidarity was evident in saving the life of an opposing group member. Consequently, highlighting the theme, in this case severe segregation turns to a unity between two sides.

Arguably, this position of morality may be derived from a historical and societal archetype of POC being unintelligent, violent, and prone to criminality (Taylor et al., 2019), leading to poor education, employment, and socio-economic status. As such, POC are likely to reside in high-crime neighborhoods (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004), implying they may be accustomed to witnessing violence and injury, despite stereotypical assumptions of unwillingness to abide by societal norms (Howitt, 2018). Moreover, a relationship has not be assumed between two unrelated themes here (Bowling & Phillips, 2002; M. R. Smith & Alpert, 2007), challenging the stereotypical illusory correlation between race and crime, reducing the normative segregation created by print media.

All aspects considered, the use of emotion and morality as discourses portrays POC conversely to other extracts, such as *saviours* opposed to *criminals*. It may be said the public are less likely to perceive BLM protestors as delinquents, and more as equals, and thus, highlighting the change to solidarity.

Extract 4 (*A4*):

(1) "Name and shame and stop any welfare payments . . . We welcomed you
(2) into our home . . . We do everything to make them feel equal. That needs to
(3) stop now after this. They don't deserve it now that's for sure . . . They have
(4) a massive continent to live in . . . They want to rule it [UK] . . . They will
(5) be the majority in a few decades . . . Open fire on [th]em and then burn
(6) [th]em"

(The Sun 08/06/2020)

This extract is comprised of comments on a tabloid newspaper (*The Sun)*, and so, information here is a direct response to unreliable news (Nadkarni, 2011) and whilst it is not representative of the general population, the comments are still attached to the newspaper's article and are highlighted as most relevant when searching the key terms of this paper. Specific apartheid language highlights segregation in the description of POC, using anger, legal, moral, and racist discourses to emphasize inherent resentment of POC and BLM supporters.

Firstly, white people are positioned as *powerful* and *superior*, where POC are *inferior* and *unimportant* through the use of derogatory and harmful language. Repeated usage of "them" and "they" highlights the segregation imposed by those that do not endorse the BLM movement and their actions in 2020, and a reluctance to accept changes in British society. POC are positioned as *power hungry* and overall holding power in line 4, in wanting to "rule" the UK, endorsing stereotypical unwillingness to conform to British societal norms (Howitt, 2018), justifying public acceptance of racism.

Derogatory language in an online medium is usually a product of anonymization (Joinson, 2010), as is present on the comments of this news article, allowing publication of hate speech as individuals are unlikely to be punished, similar to behaviors in the Deindividuation Theory (Festinger et al., 1952; Templeton & Neville, 2020). However, native Britons' hate speech can usually attributed to perceived fear of immigrants, bringing threats of disease, new culture, and religious identities, and most importantly, economic threats (Landmann et al., 2019). The phrase "stop any welfare payments," assumes immigrants have taken something from them, alongside social resentment for competitive neoliberalism (Seymour, 2014), defined by innate aggression for insufficient resources and "undeserving" or disproportionate receivers (Ganti, 2014). This ideology suggests a biological basis to racism, it may be derived from early humans adapting to new and unrecognized threats to make instant decisions to preserve life (Harker, 2015; Shipman, 2002). Consequently, in contemporary life, increasing segregation between races and each one's fear and resentment toward the other.

Drawing this theme to a close, the segregation between white and black communities can be endorsed by fear of an unrecognizable threat, and the potential of POC gaining power over predominately white countries. This extract exhibits the direct impact this has on the public, creating discourses of hate and anger in their writings, causing them to position POC and the BLM movement as *criminals*, and people to be hated.

Violence and anger

This final theme explores the concept of violence and anger, or aggression, in both agreeing and opposing perceptions in the language of the protests. The authors in these extracts may be explicitly describing violent and destructive behaviors that transpired, or the opposite, peaceful protests that allude to implicit protestations of personal anger, both of which will be explored in line with the research aims.

Extract 5 (*A4*):

(1) "Police were chased through the streets of London yesterday by anti
(2) racism protestors ... A police officer with blood coming down his face ...
(3) Escalation of violence as "lawless and reckless" ... A female cop thrown
(4) from her horse."

(The Sun 08/06/2020)

Firstly, the author of this article has used discourses of fear and anger to invoke resentment toward BLM supporters by staging them as "lawless and reckless," exhibiting the theme explicitly through descriptions of aggressive language and behaviors, perceived to be committed by BLM protestors.

Leading on from this, the author has positioned the protesters as holding power from perceived ability to exert fear and excessive violence toward law enforcement, which should possess the power. Furthermore, this power imbalance positions police officers as *innocent victims*, directly juxtaposing the mission statement of BLM: peaceful protests to achieve equality. In addition to this, the author implicitly stages BLM protesters as *violent criminals*, allowing inference of fear and resentment via the threat of violence.

This may be explained through SIDE, which suggests the presence of police may encourage rioters to attack (Reicher et al., 2004), BLM aims to combat police brutality, increasing likelihood of tension between the two groups. However, contradictions of the SIDE model suggest boundaries would be set (Klein et al., 2007), decreasing the threat of violence. Thus, the described aggression may be attributed to other present parties using anonymity of crowds to commit random acts of violence (Zimbardo et al., 1986), encourage

resentment and blame of POC. Moreover, the use of the adjective "female" as an alternative to "police officer" highlights inherent misogyny to invoke sympathy for law enforcement, and resentment toward anti-racist protesters. This is rooted in patriarchy, where women are expected to follow societal values of belonging in the home and acting as a primary caregiver (Pogrebin, 1986). Further positioning POC as *criminals* and invoking hatred from the public by playing on preferred societal patriarchal values.

On the whole, this extract is using the exhibition of aggression by BLM and far-right protesters to draw attention to increased violence on police, of which has risen 38% in the last year (Francis, 2020) believed to be due to high-profile cases, such as COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The author uses discourses of anger and emotion to scare the public into fearing POC, and nurturing an intrinsic dislike toward members of ethnic minority groups.

Extract 6 (*A9*):

(1) "The crowd that gathered that day was peaceful . . . Handing out 'free water
(2) and prayer' . . . Protesters came with masks, hand sanitizer, granola bars, water
(3) bottles, and cardboard signs: "End racist police violence," and 'Black moms
(4) want to breath.'"

(The Washington Post 14/01/2021)

The author of extract *A9* uses emotional and moral discourses to highlight the mission statement of BLM, directly juxtaposing the theme of violence and reports of aggression or criminality. The implied racial discourse toward the end validates the cause of the protest, showing intent of peace but the significance of their message.

BLM supporters explicitly hold power via their peaceful protests, and appeal to normative family values, suggesting they are positioned as *welcoming*, *family friendly*, and *peaceful*, whereas any opposing views may be seen as *racist* or *prejudiced* against POC. This emphasizes the power struggle between disparate groups, such as POC fighting for human rights where white communities do not have similar experiences, and thus, POC are positioned as *victims* of oppressive societies with prejudiced and apartheid beliefs.

It may be said that anonymization in groups increases the threat of violence, as per the Deindividuation Theory (Zimbardo et al., 1986), but studies have shown this is not always the same for crowd behaviors (R. D. Johnson & Downing, 1979). For groups, such as BLM, the normative expectations of behavior have more impact than the loss of individuality. Additionally, the use of uniforms in deindividuated groups may exacerbate individual anonymity

felt by group members (Diener, 1977), despite BLM supporters not wearing official uniforms; the use of "masks" and "cardboard signs" may serve the same purpose. The SIDE model supports the ideology of groups uniting for one purpose (Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003; Postmes & Spears, 1998), and as 97% of the protests exhibited were peaceful (Beckett, 2020), the extract suggests BLM supporters would not have partaken in violent or aggressive behaviors.

Conclusion

This paper hopes to contribute to the current narrative on the BLM protests of 2020 with regard to qualitative explorations of language and the use of such to present POC in the media, specifically the depiction of criminality that has been used in the presentation of the BLM movement.

This research has found that articles under the theme of "*diminished importance and distractions*" use different events to divert attention from the cause of the protests. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the injury of animals are used to express discourses of anger and emotion from the authors to portray POC and BLM as *criminals*, therefore influencing the public's perception of them as a group (Hackman, 2016; Lopez, 2020; Neyman & Dalsey, 2020). Furthermore, the second theme of "*segregation vs. solidarity*" found newspapers may not be wholly prejudice against BLM as one explores unity between black and white communities, invoking *sympathy* for the white victim and *respect* for the black hero. Challenging the illusory link (Bowling & Phillips, 2002; M. R. Smith & Alpert, 2007), influencing media and police into assuming a relationship between race and crime where one is not present. The final theme of "*violence*" encompasses extracts juxtaposing one another by the BLM movement being positioned as *family friendly* and *violent criminals*, suggesting newspapers contain biases relevant to author opinion.

It should be stated that we are looking at a specific subsection of print media from the UK and US, we cannot assume all media authors to be of the same judgment. However, the overarching viewpoint emerging from the texts seems to be a disagreement with the BLM protests of 2020. Additionally, the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2005) has been explored in conjunction with the above themes – suggesting a variety of media contribute to shaping the public point of view, specifically on topics related to race and crime. The comments on online news articles in *extract 4* and letters written to newspapers in *extract 2* highlight the continued impact language used by print media still have on the public, further giving support to the requirement for explorations of media language use. Interpretations of this evidence of public opinion suggests the public perceive BLM or POC to be criminals, possibly derived from fears of immigration and apartheid beliefs of post-colonial slave trade (Boisson, 2019; Olusoga, 2015).

This paper has explored the use of language in differing variations of news media with outcomes of opposing perceptions of the protests of 2020, allowing the interpretation of a relationship between race and crime, when there is little to no definitive link. Thus, we hope to have raised some important issues in policies regarding the publication of print media. Tabloid newspapers do not have an obligation to report the truth as broadcasters do (Nadkarni, 2011), involving exaggeration and extrapolation of events, therefore this research hopes to inform an ideal policy for regulating information given to the public and the associated emergence of "fake news." Going forward, further research is vital to explore the more specific reasons for cultural racism and prejudices in news media, and how this goes on to affect the treatment of POC.

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