Media Messages Surrounding Missing Women and Girls: The "Missing White Woman Syndrome" and Other Factors that Influence Newsworthiness

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A B S T R A C T   A N D   A R T I C L E   I N F O R M A T I O N

An analysis of news articles reveals a consistent trend: Missing White women and children are more likely to garner media attention than missing minority women. The glorification of missing White women and children has been dubbed the "Missing White Woman Syndrome." Despite the popularity of this concept, few scholars have examined the differential representation given to missing White and minority women and girls in the news media. This content analysis explores whether the "Missing White Woman Syndrome" exists in print media and examines which other factors—including age, job status, and motherhood status—influence story narratives. While missing White women and children were overrepresented in the news *and* more likely to receive repeated coverage, the researchers found the media used a Black missing woman or girl's legitimate job status to humanize her. Indeed, stories about missing women and children were significantly impacted by the missing person's age and job status, and the media described some missing women and girls as innocent while others were described in a salacious manner. The implications of the Missing White Woman Syndrome's existence for theory and professional practice in journalism and criminal justice, as well as those for justice policy, are discussed.

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The pressure on U.S. media to maximize ratings and, therefore, profits can readily conflict with objectivity in journalism (An & Bergen, 2007). With the exceptions of political firestorms, natural disasters, and scandalous celebrity gossip, few events in the United States consistently garner as much media coverage as the disappearance of women and children. Indeed, almost all media latch onto "mega cases" in which a newsworthy woman or girl disappears because these cases "enjoy relative longevity... [and] elicit a very strong response" (Dowler, Fleming, & Muzzatti, 2006, p. 839). Due to the pressure to garner ratings, media sources portray crimes stories as sources of entertainment in which the watcher/listener cannot help but follow (Fuhrman, 2009; Surette, 2011). However, unlike other common newsworthy topics, media surrounding missing women and children are not exhaustive. Both national and local media outlets tend to glorify certain missing persons and ignore others (Moody, Dorries, & Blackwell, 2009; Stillman, 2007; Wanzo, 2008).

Indeed, White missing women and girls seem to be in a category all their own. The fixation on missing White women and children has been termed the "Missing White Woman Syndrome" ([MWWS] Moody et al., 2009, p. 1; see also Stillman, 2007; Wanzo, 2008). Due to the enormous attention given to missing White women and children, missing people with these demographic characteristics are frequently viewed as the most-targeted victim population in the United States (Moody et al., 2009; Taylor & Sorenson, 2002; Wanzo, 2008). This overrepresentation contributed to a moral panic regarding the safety of women and children, which, in turn, led to quickly assembled justice policy with far-reaching negative effects (Maguire & Singer, 2011; Moody et al., 2009; Taylor & Sorenson, 2002; Wanzo, 2008).

Although several studies show television news media perpetuate the MWWS in the United States (Moody et al., 2009; Wanzo, 2008), it is less clear whether this phenomenon carries over to other forms of news media, such as print and online news (for an exception, see Sommers, 2017). Moreover, it is unclear what *other* factors—beyond race and gender—make a missing woman or child newsworthy in the eyes of the print media. To fill these gaps, the researchers examined stories about missing women and girls from 11 different newspapers over four years using content analysis.

Literature Review

According to the FBI's National Crime Information Center ([NCIC], 2019), authorities were aware of the fact that nearly 613,000 people were missing in 2018. Missing persons were roughly evenly divided by sex, although males (n=310,517; 50.67%) accounted for slightly higher levels than females (n=302,218; 49.31%).[i]

Missing persons are not evenly distributed by race in proportion to their representation in the U.S. population (see Molla, 2014). Whites account for 362,988 (59.23%) missing persons (NCIC, 2019), even though they represent approximately 76.91% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Asian Americans, Native Americans, Native Alaskans, Native Hawaiians, and U.S. Pacific Islanders are also underrepresented in missing persons statistics as evidenced by the fact that people from these backgrounds account for 22,908 (3.74%) missing persons (NCIC, 2019) while comprising 7.16% of the U.S. population. By contrast, Blacks account for 207,394 (33.84%) of missing persons (NCIC, 2019). That rate is more than double their representation as 13.31% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Yet, the extant literature documents that missing White persons receive a disproportionately high share of media coverage, especially as compared to missing Black people (e.g., Gilchrist, 2010; Liebler, 2010; Stillman, 2007; Wanzo, 2008).

"The Missing White Woman Syndrome"

Certain disappearances become fodder for every media outlet in the nation; these cases generally have several characteristics in common, including race and gender (Robinson, 2005; Wanzo, 2008). Certain people who disappear—typically White, conventionally attractive, innocent, female, young, and rich—are overrepresented in media coverage, whereas missing persons from racial minority backgrounds tend to be underrepresented (Taylor & Sorenson, 2002, p. 121; see also Dixon, 2008; Moody et al., 2009; Wanzo, 2008). Robinson (2005) posited several explanations for the focus on White victims, ranging from veiled racism to higher ratings and increased advertising revenue. Indeed, when it comes to the news media, White people own the means of production (Fuhrman, 2009). Simply stated, the media's focus on White people may be a result of the "in-group" being more important than the "out-group" (Gorham, 2006, p. 303).

Despite the popularity of the term "Missing White Woman Syndrome," few empirical studies have examined the phenomenon in depth. These studies vary based on media type and research goals. For example, Sommers (2017) examined the MWWS in online news. Liebler (2010) examined 31 pieces of content—including cartoons, op-eds, and news stories—with "Missing White Woman Syndrome" specifically mentioned. Conlin and Davie (2015), Min and Feaster (2010), and Simmons and Woods (2015) examined television news. Min and Feaster (2010) and Simmons and Woods (2015) focused on the portrayal of missing children, while Stillman (2007) performed a case study analysis about news coverage surrounding Jessica Lunsford and other missing or murdered White women. Jeanis and Powers (2017) examined both television and print news. Moreover, Sommers (2017) and Jeanis and Powers (2017) focused on coverage intensity. Sampling frames also varied widely, with Sommers (2017) examining online news from four different sources and Jeanis and Powers (2017) examining media disparities in cases from one state (Louisiana).

Despite differences in methodologies, media formats, and sampling frames, there were some common findings across studies focused on media portrayals of missing persons. Across gender, missing White people received more media coverage than missing people from racial minority backgrounds, and missing White people's stories were more likely to receive repeated attention (Jeanis & Powers, 2017). Moreover, despite there being more missing Black children in official missing persons statistics, Black missing children were significantly less likely to receive television news coverage than White missing children (Conlin & Davie, 2015; Simmons & Woods, 2015). When it comes to missing women and girls, missing White females were more likely to receive initial and repeated media coverage than missing minority women and girls (Sommers, 2017).

Conlin and Davie (2015) found that television news viewers felt pity and sympathy for missing children regardless of the children's race; for this reason, they challenged researchers to move beyond a race-only analysis and examine how other factors—including age, socioeconomic status, and attractiveness—may impact news media coverage of missing people. Similarly, Liebler (2010) argued that critiques of the MWWS generally focused on race without examining the impact of class, age, or appearance on story narratives. The importance of age on story narratives is clear when one considers that Jeanis and Powers (2017) found younger missing people received more media attention while older persons (50+) received less. For this reason, the researchers examined the impact of age on story narratives.

The researchers also examined the impact of job status because the media may stigmatize some women due to their occupation (Jeanis & Powers, 2017). For example, the news media sometimes dehumanized sex workers regardless of race (Stillman, 2007). As a result, women who engaged in sex work are sometimes viewed as "less-than" due to their risky lifestyles (Strega et al., 2014). Alternatively, evidence suggests the media may use occupation as part of their efforts to humanize missing women (Wanzo, 2008). In general, if a missing woman had a prestigious or high-paying profession, their occupation would be one of the focal points in their story (Wanzo, 2008). Importantly, because White people generally have more occupational prestige than their Black peers (Conley & Yeung, 2005; Cullen & Agnew, 2011), the media may fail to humanize missing Black women using their profession in the ways they do for missing White women. Given the importance of occupation, the researchers examined the impact of job status on missing women and girl's stories. The researchers hypothesized that legitimate job status would serve to humanize missing women and girls, while sex workers would be dehumanized by their job status.

MWWS and Black Feminist Theory

Black feminism is relevant to the MWWS because certain people who disappear—typically White, female, and young—receive massive media attention, while racial minorities who disappear typically do not (Dixon, 2008; Moody et al., 2009; Taylor & Sorenson, 2002; Wanzo, 2008). According to Black feminist theory, society treats Black women and girls poorly due to the combined effects of sexism and racism (Collins, 2000; Meyers, 2004). Indeed, Black women are frequently described by the media as "'oversexed-Black-Jezebels,'" "mammies," "welfare cheats" (Meyers, 2004, p. 97), and risk-takers (Slakoff & Brennan, 2017), while White women and girls are exalted and portrayed as "ideal victims" (Christie, 1986). In news stories about White missing women and girls, words such as "'perfect,' 'ideal,' 'angelic,' 'golden,' and 'fairy tale'" are used to portray privileged, happy lives (Wanzo, 2008, p. 99). Missing minority women are not humanized in the same way, leading to the belief that Whites are somehow more valuable than their counterparts of other racial minority backgrounds (Moody et al., 2009). Black and Brown people are either entirely forgotten (Stillman, 2007) or portrayed as less deserving of our collective sympathy due to risk-taking behavior (Slakoff & Brennan, 2017). Simply stated, Black feminist scholars disagree with "the common statement 'if it bleeds it

leads…[because] it really depends on who is bleeding'" (Dowler et al., 2006, p. 841).

Missing White women and girls may garner media coverage because they more readily mirror traditional ideals of American womanhood. For example, in the United States and abroad, "whiteness" is usually synonymous with beauty (Carty, 2005; Ghannam, 2008; Hunter, 2011) and sexual attractiveness (Carty, 2005; Cunningham, 2018). Moreover, despite the fact that motherhood in the United States is declining (Stone, 2018) and that familial ideologists believe the patriarchal family structure is oppressive (Gavigan, 1997; Smith, 1990), motherhood status may be used to humanize women in the news media (see Wanzo, 2008). Given this information, the researchers searched stories for mentions of motherhood status and hypothesized that motherhood status would be used to humanize missing women and girls.

The Impact of MWWS

A social reality becomes dominant in the media after various news sources disseminate the same information; when this occurs, consumers are inundated by the same constructed message over and over (Surette, 2011), often from a singular point of view. Agenda-setting theorists argue that media not only "[tell] people what to think" but also "what to think *about*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177; see also Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Put another way, media consumers find issues important once the media label the topic as such (Gross & Aday, 2003; Shaw, 1979). Although the disappearance of White women and children is an uncommon phenomenon, the media give the impression that it—and many other rare crimes—occurs frequently (Gross & Aday, 2003; Heath, 1984).[ii]

According to agenda-setting theory, heavy consumers of news will take on distorted beliefs about the real world (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014; Grabe & Drew, 2007; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). With regard to MWWS, consumers of news stories about missing White women and girls may erroneously believe that threats of abduction against members of this group are omnipresent (Wade, 2011; Wanzo, 2008). Such a narrative has social impacts beyond the distortion of reality; it has palpable consequences on law and public policy as illustrated by Megan's Law.

Megan's Law was named after a young White girl named Megan Kanka who was raped and killed by Jesse Timmendequas, a neighbor who, unbeknownst to the Kanka family, was a convicted sex offender who had settled in their New Jersey community after his release from prison. The case received nationwide media attention that caused such outrage that New Jersey enacted a law named after Kanka that made sex offenders' residency and work addresses available to the public (Wanzo, 2008). Megan's Law is controversial because it can cause severe emotional harm to sex offenders (Levenson, 2008) and "masks the much greater risks posed by those intimates—neighbors, friends, and family members—well known to children" (Wanzo, 2008, p. 107; see also Rodriguez, 2010).

The enactment of Megan's Law portrays how powerful the media are in shaping public opinion and sentiment. The media misrepresented the prevalence of White women and children disappearing; this misrepresentation led to a *moral panic* (Walker, 2011). According to Cohen (1973), a moral panic begins when "a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (p. 9; see also Critcher, 2002; Croteau & Hoynes, 2014; Jewkes & Linneman, 2018). Moral panics often demonize an "out" group, contributing to the easy dismissal of their rights, such as due process and privacy (Maguire & Singer, 2011). Moreover, moral panics tend to result in *crime control theater*—a hastily "constructed 'solution' to a socially constructed problem, enabling public officials to symbolically address an essentially intractable threat" (Griffin & Miller, 2008, p. 159; see also Zgoba, 2004). Sex offender registry and notification laws have distorted perceptions about which people are most in danger of victimization and by whom (see Connor & Tewksbury, 2017). In reality, people who are known to women and girls are much more likely to victimize them than strangers are, yet Megan's Law insinuates that the public should be more afraid of strangers within their communities (Galeste, Fradella, & Vogel, 2012).

Given the power of the news media to amplify and even distort issues in ways that can negatively affect public safety, the researchers examined whether missing White women and girls were overrepresented in the news media while missing women and girls from racial minority backgrounds were underrepresented. Moreover, the researchers examined the existence of repeated coverage.

Study Aims

The researchers took a broad approach in the current study by examining print news stories from 11 different leading sources across the United States over four different years. All articles about a missing woman or girl—regardless of age—were included. Like Jeanis and Powers (2017), the researchers examined disparities in coverage *and* focused on narrative themes. Simply stated, the goals of this study were (1) to examine whether leading print media

continues to perpetuate the MWWS and (2) to explore if other factors—including age and job status—influenced narrative themes surrounding missing women and girls.

Method

The researchers used directed content analysis to examine whether (and how) the mainstream U.S. print media perpetuate the MWWS. Directed content analysis begins with the exploration of prior research and theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After consulting relevant prior work, the researchers created a codebook with relevant categories or themes. In this case, the researchers included the codes of "race," "maternal status," "job status," "innocence," "salaciousness," "conventional beauty," and so on to the codebook. The researchers then read the news articles and coded them for the presence of these themes. When the theme was present, the researchers highlighted the corresponding passages or words and later examined those highlighted portions for deeper meaning.

The researchers examined the highlighted passages and analyzed both the manifest and latent content of the words used. Manifest content is the clearly distinguishable meaning of the story text—information that is clear without having to think deeply (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). The researchers also considered how the latent content, which is the hidden, deeper meaning of the text (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011), could potentially be interpreted by a large audience. In order to contextualize the bivariate findings below, the researchers included some of these highlighted passages as illustrative examples.

Sample

The researchers examined newspaper articles from 11 large- or medium-sized publications throughout the United States during the years 2010, 2011, 2017, and 2018. The dataset included stories from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Chicago Tribune*, *The Denver Post, Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *The Times-Picayune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. The researchers collected the 2010 and 2011 data during 2012 as part of an unpublished project. When the researchers returned to the project in 2019, we wanted to include more recent stories and increase the overall sample size. Thus, the researchers collected the 2017 and 2018 stories. This decision allowed the researchers to conduct a broad examination of the MWWS and examine what changes may have occurred over time.

The researchers downloaded the 2010 and 2011 stories from Proquest Newsstand in 2012. Since 2012, the Proquest database—now called Proquest (US Major Dailies)—has changed in structure, and the same newspapers are no longer accessible. The researchers wanted to include the same 11 newspapers across all four years, so we used two current databases—Proquest (US Major Dailies) and Access World News—to access the 2017 and 2018 stories in the same print media sources. In lieu of employing a headline search, which can miss important data, the researchers searched the full text of each article for the word "missing" coupled with any of the following words: "woman," "girl," "coed," "wife," "daughter," or "female." The researchers believed these search terms would yield the content desired and would capture all of the relevant stories. Across the four years, this search yielded 4,871 articles. Using a random start, the researchers then manually coded every sixth article in order to satisfy the systematic random sampling component of effective content analysis. This search yielded 809 articles.

Coding

The researchers conducted this study in four phases. First, the researchers read each of the 809 articles in order to remove the articles not relevant to missing women or girls. Out of 809 articles, 236 were about a missing woman or girl. Hundreds of sampled articles were about missing men,[iii] and hundreds more were write-ups or reviews about entertainment media (i.e., best-selling books, fictionalized television dramas, documentaries) whose plot centered on a missing person's case. The remainder of the excluded articles had the keywords present in their text, but the articles had nothing to do with missing women or children. Here is one example: "The victim left his home at 7 a.m. and returned at 8:15 a.m. to find his *wife*'s purse was *missing* from the front foyer area" ("Fairfax County Crime Report," 2018, para. 27).

Second, the researchers examined the 236 articles about missing women and girls for the presence of the variables shown in Table 1. Most variables focused specifically on the missing woman or girl featured in the article. These variables included age category, job status, socioeconomic status, whether she was a mother, mentions of sexuality/salaciousness, mentions of innocence, mentions of conventional beauty, her safety status, and the victim's race as mentioned in the story text. Two other variables did not specifically pertain to the missing person—the region in which the newspaper originated (which was not always the region in which the woman or girl went missing) and whether a criminal suspect was mentioned in the story.

The researchers quickly realized that the victim's race was not always evident from the text of her story. Indeed, a missing woman or girl's race was specified in the text of only 42 news stories. The researchers ran Google searches for each of the other missing persons to find photographs of them. In almost all cases, the victim's race was determined via her missing person's poster, which listed her race clearly. In some cases, the researchers determined the victim's race based on a photograph posted of her on a website (but not on her official missing person's poster).[iv] All told, the final sample consisted of 194 articles in which the researchers were able to determine the race of the missing woman or girl. Importantly, the researchers could not determine the missing woman or girl's race using either method in 42 stories—primarily because the article did not mention the missing person's name (making it impossible to search for her or the story related to her on Google). Given the importance of race to this study, the researchers excluded these 42 instances (listed in Appendix A).

During the fourth and final phase, a second researcher independently reviewed and coded a random sample of 161 articles (20%) from the 809 originally identified in the research sample. The interrater reliability between the two coders was 97% across all variables. When the coders disagreed, they discussed their coding until they reached a consensus.

Analytic Strategy

After the completion of coding, the researchers dummy-coded the variables and employed Pearson's Chi-square analyses and Fisher's Exact Tests to examine the statistical relationships between the dependent variables (e.g., innocence, salaciousness, etc.) and the independent variables (e.g., race, age, job status) at the bivariate level. Bivariate examinations were appropriate because the data consisted of nominal-level (i.e., categorical) variables (Faherty, 2008). Fisher's Exact Tests were used when expected cell counts were too low to use Peason's Chi-square analyses (Kim, 2017). The researchers reported phi (Φ) for the Chi-square analyses because it portrays the strength of association between dichotomous nominal-level variables (Kim, 2017). While the researchers were interested in the statistical relationship between variables, they also wanted to provide illustrative examples of story themes. These illustrative examples illuminate *how* missing women and girls are presented by describing the language used in their stories.

Findings

As shown in Table 1, 132 missing persons stories featured a White woman or girl (68%), 38 featured a Black woman or girl (19.6%), and 24 featured women and girls from another racial background, such as Middle Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, or Indian (12.4%).[v]

Race and Media Representation

NCIC (2019) reports missing persons by race and missing persons by sex, but does not break down either category by the other. Thus, available data do not contain the number and percentages of missing females who are White, Black, or another racial identity. The researchers therefore needed to estimate the number of missing women and girls by race by multiplying the total number of missing females (n=302,2018) by the percentage of missing persons by race (White=59.23%; Black=33.84%; Other=3.74%).[vi] We then compared those estimates to the corresponding representation of missing women and girls in our dataset.

As Table 2 illustrates, missing Black girls and women accounted for 19.59% of news stories in the research sample even though they are estimated to account for 33.84% of missing persons. This disparity of more than 14 percentage points demonstrates that the media continue to underreport stories about missing Black women and girls. Conversely, missing White girls and women are overrepresented in news stories by 8.81%, and missing women and girls from other racial backgrounds are similarly overrepresented by 8.63%.

Despite the fact that the MWWS persists, a missing female's white race did not significantly influence story themes such as socio-economic status, motherhood, salaciousness, innocence, conventional beauty, and then-current safety status. However, two salient racial differences did materialize. First, missing Black women and girls were more likely to have their legitimate jobs described in media stories than their White counterparts ($X^2 (1, N = 194) = 8.206$, $p = .004$). Second, women and girls of "other" racial backgrounds were significantly more likely to have a criminal suspect mentioned in their narratives than narratives about missing White and Black women and girls ($X^2 (1, N = 194) = 6.297$, $p = .012$).

Table 1. Codes and Descriptive Statistics for all Variables ($N = 194$)

Variables	Code	Combined Dataset (2010, 2011, 2017, 2018)	
		N	*%*
Race (Story Text Only)			
White (inc. Hispanic)	0	13	6.7
Black	1	10	5.2
Other Races	2	19	9.8
Race Not Specified	3	152	78.4
Race (Based on Story Text and/or Google Search)			
White (inc. Hispanic)	0	132	68.0
Black	1	38	19.6
Other Races	2	24	12.4
Age Categories			
Child (0-12)	0	44	22.7
Teenager (13-17)	1	25	12.9
Adult (18-29)	2	47	24.2
Older Adult (30+)	3	43	22.2
Age Not Specified	4	35	18.0
Job Status			
Job Not Stated	0	146	75.3
Lawful Job	1	43	22.2
Sex Worker	2	5	2.6
Socioeconomic Status			
Wealthy	0	7	3.6
Middle Class	1	2	1.0
Poor	2	10	5.2
Not Specified	3	175	90.2
Mom			
No/Not Stated	0	153	78.9
Yes	1	41	21.1
Sexuality/Salaciousness			
No	0	183	94.3
Yes	1	11	5.7
Innocence			
No	0	178	91.8
Yes	1	16	8.2
Conventional Beauty			
No	0	183	94.3
Yes	1	11	5.7
Safety Status			
Still Missing	0	81	41.8
Found Alive	1	31	16.0
Found Dead	2	82	42.3
Suspect Status			
Not Mentioned	0	99	51.0
Mentioned	1	95	49.0
Region			
West	0	51	26.3
Midwest	1	54	27.8
Northeast	2	44	22.7
South	3	45	23.2

Table 2. Comparison of Missing Persons to Media Representation

Missing Females					
	Estimates by Race		*Representation in Dataset*		*Over- or Under-Representation*
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	
White	179,004	59.23%	132	68.04%	8.81%
Black	102,271	33.84%	38	19.59%	-14.25%
Other	11,303	3.74%	24	12.37%	8.63%
Unknown	9,641	3.19%	-	0.00%	
	302,218	100.00%	194	100.00%	

Recurrent Themes in Media Stories about Missing Women and Girls

Factors other than a missing person's race also significantly influenced media narratives, most notably the missing female's age. Missing girls under the age of 13 were significantly less likely to be described as mothers (X^2 $_{(1, N = 194)}$ = 9.395, *p* = .002) as women and girls of other ages. Missing girls under the age of 13 were also significantly more likely to be described as innocent (*p*=.012). The theme of innocence sometimes appeared subtly within the latent content of the text. For example, in a 2011 article from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the author described the discovery of a missing girl's training wheels (Anonymous, 2011). A *Denver Post* article about the disappearance of a 10-year-old autistic girl described her as a "'wonderful, silly little girl'" who "loved to play on her trampoline" and was "clearly at risk if she became lost" (Jordan & Nicholson, 2011, para. 1). A 2018 article from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* described a missing woman as someone with a "nonverbal learning disability" and a "need to fit in, to be accepted" (Staples, 2018, para. 20 & 27). Her parents had "great concern" for her because "people took advantage of her" (Staples, 2018, para. 27). Within the latent content of these quotations, the media described the missing girls or women as having a playful innocence or naiveté. This latent content may invoke sympathy from the reader.

The researchers also examined the relationship between the missing woman or girl's age and whether she was described in a salacious (i.e., consensually sexual) manner.[vii] Women between the ages of 18 and 29 were significantly more likely to have information about consensual sex or sexuality present in their stories (*p* = .005) and to be described as sex workers (*p* =.013) Within story text, some mentions of salaciousness or sexuality were overt. In a 2017 story from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* about the death of a missing White 14-year-old girl named Grace Packer, the girl's mother (her murderer) described her daughter as "sexually inappropriate" and stated that the girl "sexually act[ed] out with peers, younger children and older men" (McDaniel, 2017, para. 7). The theme of salaciousness or sexuality was also present in stories about extramarital affairs. In a *Denver Post* story, Beverly England—a White mother of two—is described as being "in a love triangle" and as "having an affair" with a married man (Mitchell, 2018, paras. 4 & 8). In a 2010 *Washington Post* story, missing White federal intern Chandra Levy was described as the "other woman" in "then-Congressman Gary Condit's … affair" (Alexander, 2010, para. 1). With regard to missing sex workers, stories often clearly stated their profession. For example, a 2011 *Los Angeles Times* story referred to Shannan Gilbert as "a missing New Jersey prostitute" ("National Briefing," 2011, para. 1).

Moreover, women aged 30 or older were significantly more likely to be described as mothers (X^2 (1, *N* = 194) = 29.888, *p* = .000). The media portrayed a female's motherhood status in the manifest content of the story; there was no question whether the woman was a mother because her children were directly mentioned. For example, in a 2011 story from *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*, a Middle Eastern woman named Wazineh Suleiman "told her children, ages 6 to 12, she was driving to Walmart to rent a movie" before she disappeared (Stevens, 2011, para. 1). In a 2018 article from the *Los Angeles Times*, police explained that Aaron Aubrey was "suspected in his mom's killing" and disappearance (Hamilton, 2018, para. 1). In a 2010 *Chicago Tribune* story, the search for "Tanya Shannon, 40, a mother of four from Ransom" was described (Schorsch, 2010, para. 1). Moreover, missing women aged 30 or older were significantly less likely to have a suspect mentioned in their stories (X^2 (1, *N* = 194) = 4.386, *p* = .036) and

significantly more likely to be described in their stories as having been found alive compared to missing people of other ages (X^2 (1, N = 194) = 8.359, p = .004).

The researchers also examined the relationship between a missing person's job status and themes of innocence or salaciousness. Missing women and girls with legitimate jobs (including those who were students or retired) were significantly more likely to be described as innocent (p =.010). Alternatively, women or girls who participated in sex work were significantly more likely to be described as salacious (p =.000). Although the researchers acknowledge the connection between sex work and salaciousness might be tautological, it is still important to include this finding because the public may use salacious details to victim blame.

The region in which the newspaper was written significantly impacted several story themes.

Stories from the South were significantly more likely to describe the missing person as a mother (X^2 (1, N = 194) = 7.311, p = .007), while stories published in the Midwest were significantly less so (X^2 (1, N = 194) = 4.510 p = .034). Stories written in the Midwest were significantly less likely to describe a missing woman or girl as salacious (p = .036) and significantly more likely to describe "still missing" women and girls (X^2 (1, N = 194) = 4.395, p = .036). Stories about missing women and girls written in the Northeast were significantly more likely to describe the person as having been found dead (X^2 (1, N = 194) = 4.937, p = .026) and significantly less likely to describe missing women aged 30 or older (X^2 (1, N = 194) = 7.769, p = .005). Alternatively, stories written in the South were significantly more likely to portray missing women aged 30 or older (X^2 (1, N = 194) = 10.803, p = .001).

Table 3. Chi-Square Analyses & Fisher's Exact Tests (2-Sided)* w/ Dummy-Coded Variables

Variables	Combined Dataset (2010, 2011, 2017, 2018) n = 194			
	$\chi2$	DF	P	Phi (Φ)
Black / Legitimate Job	8.206	1	.004	.206
"Other" Race / Suspect Mentioned	6.297	1	.012	-.180
Child Aged 0 -12 / Innocence			.012	
Child Aged 0 – 12 / Mom	9.395	1	.002	-.220
Adult 18-29 / Salaciousness			.005	
Adult 18-29 / Sex Worker			.013	
Older Adult (30+) / Mom	29.888	1	.000	.393
Older Adult (30+) / Suspect Mentioned	4.386	1	.036	-.150
Older Adult (30+) / Described as Found Alive	8.359	1	.004	.208
Legitimate Job / Innocence			.010	
Sex Worker / Salaciousness			.000	
Midwest / Mom	4.510	1	.034	-.152
Midwest / Salaciousness			.036	
Midwest / Described as Still Missing	4.395	1	.036	.151
Northeast / Described as Found Dead	4.937	1	.026	.160
Northeast / Aged 30+	7.769	1	.005	-.200
South / Mom	7.311	1	.007	.194
South / Aged 30+	10.803	1	.001	.236

* When reporting results from Fisher's Exact Tests, only p-values are included (Simon, 2000).

Repeated News Coverage

Across all stories (*n*=194), White missing women and girls received more repeated coverage. Indeed, 19 missing women or girls had two or more stories written about them within the dataset, and 16 of these missing women or girls were White. Moreover, the media wrote three or more stories about eight missing women and girls featured within the dataset, and seven of these missing females were White (see Table 4).

Table 4. Repeated Coverage by Race

Race	Name	Number of Stories
White (inc. Hispanic)	Milly Dowler	6
	Lisa Irwin	5
	Caliyah McNabb	3
	Stacy Peterson	3
	Caylee Anthony	3
	Kathleen Durst	3
	Kelsey Berreth	3
	Aliahna Lemmon	2
	Grace Packer	2
	Raffalella Stoik	2
	Shannan Gilbert	2
	Shannan Watts	2
	Tanya Shannon	2
	Angela Hernandez	2
	Breann Rodriguez	2
	Monica Redmond	2
Black	Semaj Crosby	3
	Millicent Williams	2
"Other"	Wazineh Suleiman	2
Total # of Repeated Stories		51
Total # of Non-Unique Cases~		19
Total # of Unique Cases*		143
~ 19 missing women or girls had two or more articles in our dataset. * 143 missing women or girls had only one article in our dataset.		

Discussion

White missing women and girls were overrepresented within our study, while Black missing women and girls were underrepresented (Table 2). We also found White women and girls were more likely to have repeated news coverage (see Table 4). A White missing woman or girl's race did not significantly affect story themes about her. By contrast, however, missing Black women and girls were significantly more likely to have their legitimate employment mentioned in their stories. Such mentions of legitimate employment might have been used in attempts to humanize these missing women and girls.

For example, in a 2017 story from *The Times-Picayune*, a Black woman named Regina Williams was described as "'one of the best social workers in the profession'" and was credited for inspiring a friend's "decision to become a social worker herself" (Nobles, 2017, para. 8). Given this description, viewers may feel sympathy and pity for Williams; she was a high-functioning member of society who contributed to the world around her. The description of Black missing women and girls as productive members of society illustrates that their absence is a significant loss.

The researchers also found that missing women and girls of the "Other" racial category were

significantly more likely to have a suspect mentioned in their stories. On one hand, a description of a criminal suspect in a person's disappearance may cause viewers and readers to sympathize with these women because their disappearance was not purposeful or planned. On the other hand, given that most interpersonal crimes against women and girls are intra-racial (Gross, 2016; Stacey, 2019) and perpetrated by men known to the victim (National Institute of Justice, 2008), viewers may interpret this to mean that men in the "Other" racial category are more violent than men in other racial categories.

The age of the missing person also significantly affected story themes. Indeed, children aged 12 or younger were significantly more likely to be described as innocent, which is unsurprising given that childhood and innocence are frequently linked in Western culture (Taylor, 2010). Moreover, it is unsurprising that young girls aged 12 or younger are rarely described as mothers given that the average age of first menstruation is around 12.5 years of age (Chumlea et al., 2003). Stories about women ages 18 to 29 were significantly more likely to mention sexuality or salaciousness. This description of women is unsurprising given the age in which many people become sexually active, but teenagers and adults over 30 are also sexual beings, and stories do not describe them in the same way. Moreover, sexuality is not evil or immoral, yet this theme often portrayed the missing person in culturally negative ways—as someone sexually acting out or as the "other woman" in an affair. These descriptions may be factual, but they can delegitimize a victim's plight; indeed, a reader may place blame on the victim due to her overt sexuality. Across multiple feminisms, there is agreement that the oversexualization of women's bodies is a form of oppression (Hegarty, 1998), and it appears that women between 18 and 29 are often purposefully portrayed in ways that communicate sexual deviance.

The media were significantly more likely to describe women aged 30 or older as mothers compared to women and girls in other age groups. We argue the media use motherhood status to humanize missing women. Readers may feel terrible that this person is missing because she has children at home who need her. With that said, the media may portray women in this age group as mothers more frequently because more of them are mothers; simply put, older women are more likely to have children than younger women or girls. Stories about women aged 30 or older were more likely to describe them as having been "found alive" and less likely to describe a criminal suspect in their disappearances. First, it is possible that older missing women are more likely to leave their homes on their own volition; if this is the case, then it is more likely that they would be found alive and that there would be no suspect in the disappearance. Alternatively, the media overrepresent crimes committed by strangers (DiBennardo, 2018), and older victims are the least likely to be victimized by strangers (Harrell, 2012). Given that the media often feature stranger victimization, but, in the real world, strangers rarely victimize older women, it makes sense that fewer stories involving older disappeared women would discuss a criminal suspect.

Although stories rarely mentioned a missing woman and girl's socioeconomic status, media focus on missing persons' occupations may be linked to their social class position (Meyers, 2004). Interestingly, "about half (51%) of employed Americans say they get a sense of identity from their job," whereas the other half say it is simply a way to make a living (Pew Research Center, 2016, para. 14). In our study, the missing women or girls who had lawful jobs (including students and those who had retired) were significantly more likely to have their innocence mentioned in the story. As discussed above, their job status may be used as a way to humanize them. They are portrayed as productive members of society.

In contrast, the researchers found sex workers were significantly more likely to have sexuality or salacious details mentioned in their stories. This finding is unsurprising given the nature of their work. Importantly, news stories sometimes equated sex work with an overall risky lifestyle. For example, in a 2017 article from *The Atlanta Journal – Constitution*, the author described Deborah Crawford as a sex worker and drug peddler who spent time with "unsavory characters" (Badertscher, 2017, para. 20). In a 2011 *Wall Street Journal* article about a murdered sex worker, a district attorney stated that Megan Waterman was killed as "a direct result of [her] business as [a] prostitute" (Gardiner, 2011, para. 1). Simply put, readers and viewers may equate sex work with a larger propensity toward criminality or risk-taking behavior, and this may cause readers to have less sympathy and respect toward sex workers compared to other missing people.

Stories from the South were more likely to describe the person as a mother, and stories from the Midwest were less likely to do so. As previously discussed, familial ideologists argue that the patriarchal family structure is oppressive (Gavigan, 1997), yet motherhood is applauded in American culture (Barak, Leighton, & Cotton, 2018; Smith, 1990). The researchers believe the motherhood theme humanizes these women and grants them importance, especially in the U.S. South. In the South, the percentage of evangelical Christians, who tend to emphasize conformity to gender roles and traditional family values, is at least eight percentage points higher than in the Midwest, which has the second highest

percentage of people who identify as members of an evangelical Christian faith (Pew Research Center, 2014).

The region in which a story was written significantly impacted story themes with regard to other factors as well. This is unsurprising because the importance of region in story telling is not a new concept; throughout history, literary authors have defined United States regions as unique places with their own cultural norms (Shortridge, 1991). Regions come with their own history and identity (Abadi, 2018), and, importantly, crime rates vary across region (Burns, 2000; Nesbitt, 1993). Southern culture may help explain why stories written in the South are significantly more likely to focus on missing mothers and women 30 or older, while Midwest culture may explain why stories written in the Midwest are less likely to focus on missing mothers and to describe missing women and girls as salacious. Indeed, our findings suggest that newspapers in varying regions may have different news values or thresholds for what makes a story newsworthy. While an in-depth look at the impact of regional culture on portrayals of women is beyond the scope of the current research, future research might examine the link between regional context and news story content more closely.

Previous research supports the existence of the MWWS (Jeanis & Powers, 2017; Sommers, 2017). Although the researchers did not find statistically significant relationships between whiteness and key thematic elements, the data from the research sample suggests that MWWS persists in light of the overrepresentation of missing White women and girls and the underrepresentation of missing Black women and girls. The results from the current study also suggest that the MWWS may be so ingrained in contemporary print media that journalists and readers alike might *assume* story subjects are White. Recall from Table 1 that only 13 articles (6.7%) in this study explicitly described a missing woman or girl as White in text, yet an online search via Google revealed that 132 stories (68%) featured White victims. Given that the news media rarely mention a White woman or girl's race, yet many news stories focus on White women and girls, we should be concerned that news consumers may assume victims in news stories are White unless specifically stated otherwise.

The news media were significantly more likely to describe Black missing women and girls as having legitimate employment compared to missing females of other races. At first blush, this may suggest that MWWS is declining insofar as missing Black females are being humanized with details about their value to society vis-à-vis their employment. But the significant racial differences with regard to mentioning legitimate employment appeared only in

the initial time frame sampled in the present study; no significant differences were detected in the latter time (see Appendix C). The researchers can only speculate about why this may be. It could be that in the earlier part of the 2010s, journalists were more likely to report on Black women having good jobs because they viewed such a fact as noteworthy either as a function of either conscious or implicit bias. The fact that no racial differences were detected in the second time period might optimistically suggest broader acknowledgement of Black women's meaningful contributions to society through their work such that it no longer requires mentioning to a significantly higher degree than other women's employment status. Conversely, and more pessimistically, journalists might not be trying to humanize missing Black females to the same extent they once did. Or, perhaps, a race-neutral reason accounts for this change over time. Specifically, it may be that females' job status is viewed as being less important than other factors of newsworthiness such that it is rarely mentioned. Conversely, job status may be so important that it is mentioned for all women, regardless of race.

Implications

The extant research on MWWS posits that the syndrome affects public consciousness as well as crime control policy (Kulig & Cullen, 2017; Wanzo, 2008). Importantly, over 86% of named laws passed in the United States between 1990 and 2016 honored White victims (Kulig & Cullen, 2017), showing that the protection of White people is very important to lawmakers. As previously described, sensationalistic United States media coverage of missing White women and children led to a moral panic about rare stranger abductions. In reality, strangers abduct less than one percent of missing children in the United States (Finkelhor, 2013). Intimate partners, family members, and acquaintances are much more likely to victimize women and girls than strangers (Chenier, 2012).

Policy makers respond to moral panics with "*crime control theater*"—enacting laws that purport to increase public safety, but, in reality, run contrary to empirical data and often decrease public safety (Griffin & Miller, 2008, p. 159). Some of these policies, such as Megan's Law (which makes sex offenders' residency and work addresses available to the public) are arguably the result of the MWWS (Wanzo, 2008). Simply put, offender registration and notification laws, as well as legislation creating "predator-free zones," represent feel-safe policies based on one-size-fits-all responses to sensationalized cases (Meloy, Saleh, & Wolff, 2007; Rodriguez, 2010). Although arguably well-intentioned, these

policies put members of society at greater risk for crime victimization.[viii]

Importantly, steps can be taken to reduce the impact of the MWWS. Journalists should—and absolutely can—make strides to represent crime in a way that is both realistic and non-sensational. Both journalists and law enforcement entities should make a conscious effort to publicize crimes that involve minority victims. Research shows that police work harder to solve a case once it has media coverage (Lee, 2005). For this reason alone, the expanded coverage of missing minority women is of monumental importance.

Limitations

The present study is constrained by several limitations. First, the researchers lacked the photography that may (or may not) have originally accompanied each article because Proquest (Newsstand and US Major Dailies) and Access World News are text-only databases. The lack of original photography required the missing person's race to be determined via Google search (usually via their missing person's poster). Given that most people enter a news story through the dominant photograph (The Poynter Institute, 1991), the original photography would have been a rich source of data for this study.

Second, the researchers recognize the interesting analytical questions that come from comparing media representations of missing women and girls across two time periods, especially considering the differences in the sociological and political structure of the United States during 2010 and 2011 (under President Obama) compared to 2017 and 2018 (under President Trump). Given our primary goal of examining the MWWS across a large sample of stories, we did not focus our analyses on the differences across time. With that said, the researchers included descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses for the two periods in Appendices B and C. While this type of analysis would have necessitated a shift in our research goals for this study, we strongly encourage future researchers to examine time-based shifts in media portrayals.

Third, a limitation of content analyses is that it requires researchers to interpret media in order to code data. In comparison to other forms of data collection, data coding may be affected by the fact that each coder brings different biases, life experiences, and motivations to the study at hand. Although high levels of inter-rater reliability in the present study strongly suggest that the researchers are reporting reliable results, it is important to understand that no researcher views articles in the exact same way as another researcher.

Fourth, the NCIC does not differentiate missing females by race. Thus, although the figures presented in Table 2 contain the best estimates in light of available data, it is possible that the actual numbers and percentages of missing women and girls by race are slightly different.

Fifth, not only does the NCIC fail to account for missing persons who identify as being two or more races, but also it fails to systematically indicate the ethnicity of missing persons. Thus, NCIC data fails to capture important data on missing persons from multiracial backgrounds, as well as missing persons of Hispanic or Latinx identities. Indeed, NCIC reports Hispanic and Latinx people as being White, thereby erasing an important and growing demographic segment of the U.S. population.

Finally, another limitation of content analysis concerns the lack of information researchers have about the reporting process and the reporter disseminating the information. It is not entirely clear whether reporters chose to cover certain missing women or girls or if their supervisors—especially senior editors, general managers, or even owners—asked them to do so. It is also unclear to what extent the reporters' own biases and life experiences may influence their work. Indeed, the researchers do not know whether the reporters knew the missing woman or girl's race prior to disseminating their articles. Until quality data can be recorded about reporters and the reporting process, it is not clear whether reporters are inherently more likely to report on certain people, if the decision on what to report is entirely out of their hands due to profit-making motives, and if their own biases may be reflected in their work.

Conclusion

Although media need to continue addressing the MWWS, the commoditization of the news likely complicates such efforts due the importance of high ratings (An & Bergen, 2007; MacKinnon, 2005). An anonymous news reporter said it best: "We showcase missing, young, White, attractive women because our research shows we get more viewers, [and] it is about beating the competition and [garnering] ad dollars" (MacKinnon, 2005, para. 9). Put differently, the media still view White women and girls as ideal victims (Christie, 1986). The researchers argue that a crucial step in dismantling the MWWS is discovering how to make stories about missing minority women more profitable to the media. In the meantime, it seems the media is yet another avenue in which the needs of White victims and their families come first.

With regard to positive portrayals, the researchers argue the media humanized missing women or girls via descriptions of their motherhood

status, innocence/purity, and/or job status. Although assumptions about acceptable female behavior are under much scrutiny and even critique, it is interesting to note that the favorable portrayals the researchers found aligned with traditional ideals about what a woman or girl *should* be. Indeed, in our study, it seems "good" missing women and girls were those who had children, maintained sexual purity, and gained legitimate employment.

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Footnotes

[i]   According to the NCIC (2019), the sexes of the remaining number of missing persons were unknown (*n*=111; 0.02%).

[ii]   Importantly, the phenomenon of media distortion of factual news has been exacerbated in the Digital Age. According to the Pew Research Center (Matsa & Shearer, 2018), nearly half of all adults in the United States routinely get news from social media platforms, even though a majority of people have concerns about the accuracy of these sources. Most social media users admit that news coverage on social media does not improve their understanding of current events (Matsa & Shearer, 2018).

[iii] The stories about missing males found in this sample were "false positives" because our search terms were female-focused. In order to do a comparison between genders, the researchers would need to use male-focused search terms in the same newspapers across the same four years. While we believe a comparison in news coverage across male and female missing person's stories is an important academic endeavor, this type of analysis is outside of the purview of the current study.

[iv]   It is potentially problematic to determine someone's race based on a photograph, as Americans are increasingly mixed race (Tsui, 2018). With that said, skin tones vary for White, Black, and Latinx people (Wilkinson, Garand, & Dunaway, 2015). In the few cases in which a photograph was the primary tool used to establish race, both authors agreed about the coding.

[v]   The NCIC (2019) data include Hispanic people in the White category. For this reason, the researchers included Hispanic females in the White count.

[vi]   According to the NCIC (2019), the race of the remaining 19,556 (3.19%) missing persons is unknown.

[vii]   We did not code mentions of sexual assault as salaciousness because sexual assault takes place without consent. Descriptions of consensual sexual activities (e.g., sleeping with multiple partners, having extramarital affairs) were coded as salacious.

[viii]   For example, consider the risk of homelessness that sex offenders face as a function of stringent residence restrictions. Not only does homelessness make it quite difficult for law enforcement to track sex offenders effectively (Cherry, 2019), but homelessness produces stressors to the offender that may actually trigger additional offending (Levenson, 2008).

Appendix A

1) Law & Order Public Safety. (2010, January 14). *St. Louis Post – Dispatch*, p. A3.

2) Body found in Illinois park is that of missing woman. (2010, February 8). *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. A5.

3) Prado, P. (2010, March 4). World news: Quake jolts Chile's President-Elect from his agenda. *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A15.

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6) Hardy, D. (2010, April 5). 5 arrested in Trenton gang rape of 7-year-old. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. B3.

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8) Notebook – Pro football. (2010, May 7). *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. C8.

9) Nation and world digest. (2010, May 20). *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. A7.

10) Local digest. (2010, June 2). *The Washington Post*, p. C1.

11) Blevins, J. (2010, June 11). Rafting guide arrested in rescue; Clear Creek's sheriff says the man interfered with efforts to reach a stranded teen girl. *Denver Post*, p. A1.

12) News in brief. (2010, June 23). *Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. B2.

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14) Luo, M., & Robbins, L. (2010, July 8). Barge strikes a tourist boat in Philadelphia. *New York Times*, p. A14.

15) Rivera, R., Baker, A., & Roberts, R. (2010, July 12). A few blocks, 4 Years, 52,000 police stops. *New York Times*, p. A1.

16) Nation/world. (2010, August 1). *Chicago Tribune*, p. 10.

17) 1,000 words: Atrani, Italy. (2010, September 11). *Los Angeles Times*, p. A2.

18) Morris, M., Spink, J., Davis, J., Hunt, A., Fox, P. (2010, October 13). Community news. *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*, p. B3.

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20) News in brief. (2010, November 11). *Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. B2.

21) U.S. news: U.S. watch. (2010, November 19). *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A4.

22) Late briefing; New York; Searchers find bodies on beach. (2010, December 14). *Los Angeles Times*, p. AA2.

23) Ross, B. (2011, January 27). Texas man inspired after his own tragedy to help others, like the Reeds, find missing loved ones. *The Times-Picayune*, p. A1.

24) City news: Greater New York watch. (2011, April 13). *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A21.

25) Nation/world. (2011, April 14). *Chicago Tribune*, p. 10.

26) Cimilluca, D., & Sonne, P. (2011, July 7). Corporate News: BSkyB Approval Could Be Delayed. *The Wall Street Journal*, p. B3.

27) News in brief. (2011, July 21). *Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. B2.

28) Cimilluca, D. (2011, July 29). Murdoch to remain BSkyB Chairman. *The Wall Street Journal*, p. B3.

29) Sernoffsky, E. (2017, January 24). Bay Area can dry out in calm after storms. *San Francisco Chronicle,* p. C1.

30) Schroering, H. (2017, March 23). After Facebook Live attack, girl is again being victimized. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 4.

31) Stein, P. (2017, April 8). In D.C., a longtime sanctuary for teens. *The Washington Post*, p. B4.

32) McKnight, L. (2017, May 28). Accused child porn maker got previous life sentence slashed. *The Times-Picayune*, p. B4.

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34) Newall, M. (2017, September 3). At march, putting grief into action – Marching for those lost to addiction. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. B1.

35) Myers, A.L. (2017, November 12). Las Vegas shooting victims still searching for their heroes. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. A14.

36) Moran, R. (2017, November 23). Remains of two fire victims found - Four residents had been reported missing after Barclay Friends fire in West Chester. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. B4.

37) Foreman, L. (2018, February 15). Southwest Atlanta - 'Find My Friend s' app leads boyfriend to woman's body - Technology points police to woods near charter school. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. B2.

38) Brasch, B. (2018, March 15). Cobb County – Man shoots self as cops close in. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. B4.

39) Associated Press. (2018, November 13). Death toll climbs from California fires. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. A1.

40) Egelko, B. (2018, November 22). Metro. *San Francisco Chronicle,* p. C1.

41) Olson, Y.S. (2018, November 5). 1 dead, 1 missing in group lake swim. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 3.

42) Craig, T. (2018, November 16). After deadliest fire in California history, search for human remains begins. *The Washington Post*, p. A8.

Appendix B

Codes and Descriptive Statistics for all Variables Over Time Periods

Variables	Code	Time 1 (2010-2011)		Time 2 (2017-2018)	
		N = 76		N = 118	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Race (Story Text Only)					
White	0	5	6.6	8	6.8
Black	1	0	0	10	8.5
Other Races	2	7	9.2	12	10.2
Race Not Specified	3	64	84.2	88	74.6
Race (Based on Story Text and/or Google Search)					
White	0	58	76.3	74	62.7
Black	1	9	11.8	29	24.6
Other Races	2	9	11.8	15	12.7
Age Categories					
Child (0-12)	0	20	26.3	24	20.3
Teenager (13-17)	1	9	11.8	16	13.6
Adult (18-29)	2	17	22.4	30	25.4
Older Adult (30+)	3	16	21.1	27	22.9
Age Not Specified	4	14	18.4	21	17.8
Job Status					
Job Not Stated	0	59	77.6	87	73.7
Lawful Job	1	13	17.1	30	25.4
Sex Worker	2	4	5.3	1	0.8
Socioeconomic Status					
Wealthy	0	1	1.3	6	5.1
Middle Class	1	0	0	2	1.7
Poor	2	2	2.6	8	6.8
Not Specified	3	73	96.1	102	86.4
Mom					
No/Not Stated	0	65	85.5	88	74.6
Yes	1	11	14.5	30	25.4
Sexuality/Salaciousness					
No	0	70	92.1	113	95.8
Yes	1	6	7.9	5	4.2
Innocence					
No	0	70	92.1	108	91.5
Yes	1	6	7.9	10	8.5
Conventional Beauty					
No	0	71	93.4	112	94.9
Yes	1	5	6.6	6	5.1
Safety Status					
Still Missing	0	39	51.3	42	35.6
Found Alive	1	12	15.8	19	16.1
Found Dead	2	25	32.9	57	48.3
Suspect Status					
Not Mentioned	0	44	57.9	55	46.6
Mentioned	1	32	41.1	63	53.4
Region					
West	0	16	21.1	35	29.7
Midwest	1	27	35.5	27	22.9
Northeast	2	19	25	25	21.2
South	3	14	18.4	31	26.3

Appendix C

Chi-Square Analyses & Fisher's Exact Tests (2-Sided)* with Dummy-Coded Variables

Variables	Time 1 (2010 – 2011) N = 76				Time 2 (2017 – 2018) N = 118			
	χ2	DF	P-Value	Phi (Φ)	χ2	DF	P-Value	Phi (Φ)
White / Child Aged 0 – 12	5.242	1	.030	.263			N/S	
Black / Child Aged 0 – 12			N/S		4.747	1	.029	.201
Black / Legitimate Job			.041				N/S	
"Other" Race / Mom			N/S				.011	
"Other" Race / Suspect Mentioned			N/S		4.931	1	.026	-.204
"Other" Race / Aged 30+			N/S				.021	
Child Aged 0 -12 / Innocence			.038				N/S	
Child Aged 0 – 12 / Mom			N/S		4.641	1	.031	-.198
Teenager 13 – 17 / Suspect Mentioned			N/S		5.733	1	.016	.221
Adult 18-29 / Salaciousness			.000				N/S	
Adult 18-29 / Sex Worker			.002				N/S	
Older Adult (30+) / Mom			.009		21.140	1	.000	.423
Older Adult (30+) / Suspect Mentioned	4.535	1	.033	-.244			N/S	
Older Adult (30+) / Described as Found Alive			.000				N/S	
Legitimate Job / Innocence			N/S (.059)				N/S (.062)	
Legitimate Job / Suspect Mentioned			N/S		4.460	1	.035	.194
Sex Worker / Salaciousness			.000				.042	
West / Adult 18-29			.039				N/S	
West / Innocence			N/S				.032	
Midwest / Mom			N/S (.085)				N/S	
Midwest / Salaciousness			N/S (.083)				N/S	
Midwest / Described as Still Missing	6.086	1	.014	.283			N/S	
Midwest / Described as Found Dead	3.921	1	.048	-.227			N/S	
Midwest / Child Aged 0 – 12	4.494	1	.034	.243			N/S	
Midwest / Adult 18 -29	8.401	1	.004	-.332			N/S	
Midwest / Suspect Mentioned			N/S		5.659	1	.017	-.219
Northeast / Sex Worker			.046				N/S	
Northeast / Described as Still Missing	12.798	1	.000	-.410			N/S	
Northeast / Described as Found Dead	19.094	1	.000	.501			N/S	
Northeast / Aged 30+			N/S		6.409	1	.011	-.233
South / Mom			.004				N/S	
South / Aged 30+			N/S		5.970	1	.015	.225
South / Described as Found Alive			.007				N/S	

* When reporting results from Fisher's Exact Tests, only p-values are included (Simon, 2000).