Societal Perceptions of White vs. Black Perpetrators of Crime as Shown Through Media Representation

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Introduction

There has always been a surprising gravitation of audiences to the "true crime" genre. Whether through morbid TV shows, serial killer movies, or dark true crime books, individuals find themselves fascinated by this dark part of life, often becoming hyper-fixated on the genre. Within these forms of media, a stark difference can be found in how crimes and criminals are portrayed based on the race and status of the perpetrator. Crimes committed by the conventionally attractive, high-status, White male become glorified and gain much more positive media attention compared to crimes committed by Black men who come from lesser status and are antagonized by the media and by the public who perceive it.

The topic only begins to expand when considering how the media portrays the victims of these crimes. While young, White, educated women are spoken about with love and empathy, young Black victims are refused this compassion and rather ignored or even villainized as their suspected killers. When societal class and status become factors, it becomes apparent that the media gives more importance and coverage to Black perpetrators, without overtly villainizing them, who are of celebrity status.

In this paper, I will analyze three different documentaries I watched to examine how the media portrayed the cases of three different individuals: Ted Bundy, Wayne Williams, and O.J. Simpson. I watched each documentary to understand the role of race in media representation of crimes and the way society perceives it. Each documentary provides a different outlook that overarcs in understanding the media coverage of the time and their implications in this study.

Methodology

This paper is organized in a content/relational analysis method in order to demonstrate the different factors: race of the perpetrators, race of the victims, societal status, and even fictional TV shows that romanticize the stories of White killers in a manner that is never even offered to Black perpetratorsTo delve into this media representation, I decided to watch three separate true crime documentaries that explored these individuals, cases, and the news coverage at the time. I watched each documentary individually, taking detailed notes on the types of language used to describe the perpetrators, the amount and what kind of

media coverage surrounding the case, and how the victims were portrayed. Utilizing this research method of content analysis, I was able to explore the themes of race and status in relation to the type of media coverage surrounding crimes committed by White versus Black perpetrators. For an analysis of the glorified White perpetrator, I chose a Netflix documentary, *Conversations With a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, which thoroughly demonstrates news and media coverage of the Ted Bundy case. For a similar analysis, but of a Black perpetrator, I watched an HBO Max documentary, *Atlanta's Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children*, which delved into the Wayne Williams case, as well as offered an outlook into news coverage of the occurrence. Lastly, I used this same analysis method while focusing on a case that combines the variables of race, social status, and wealth by watching an ESPN documentary on the Hulu streaming platform, *O.J.: Made in America*.

I took note of the specific terminology used for describing Bundy, Williams, and Simpson, as I was interested in seeing either glorification or antagonization demonstrated in the way the individuals were presented in the media. Additionally, I took heed of the different images of newspaper or magazine clippings that used these cases in their headlines, focusing on the adjectives used to discuss the three individuals. Television clippings of interviews and the news from that specific time, including footage from inside the court, were also noted. Through these focus points, I was able to formulate a connection between the themes of race and status to the media coverage of these perpetrators.

Findings

Ted Bundy

To begin with, the documentary *Conversations With a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, released on Netflix in 2019, consists of four episodes, and it includes interviews with individuals involved in his case, such as the defense and prosecution team, survivors, and individuals who knew him. Additionally, it includes footage from the trial, news clippings, and voice recordings from Bundy's interviews with the author, who recorded their meetings to write a book about the trial and the individual. The documentary was incredibly helpful because of the copious amount of footage it contained from the specific time that Bundy was active and that the investigation was underway. The

documentary demonstrated how the media often glorified Bundy after his arrest, using very positive adjectives to describe him. For example the word "mysterious" was often used to discuss Bundy, as well as "handsome" and "good-looking." Also, newspaper clippings often demonstrated an ignorance towards the crimes or victims, focusing rather on describing the aspects of Bundy they found captivating, as well as glorifying his role in his own murder trial. The fourth and final episode of the documentary provided many pictures of newspaper clippings of the time that consisted of headlines that glorified Bundy. For example, one newspaper clipping headline stated, "He's clean cut, witty, smart: An Unlikely Murder Trial Star," and another one, using the same questionable adjective, stated, "Crime Scene Star." The new coverage and their obsession with calling him a "Star," made it apparent that individuals at that time seemed to find Bundy as some sort of celebrity, confusing his involvement in a very real criminal trial as the individual charged with several murders for a breakout role as an actor in a movie. The documentary's first episode showed that the news reporters often focused on his previous career aspirations, calling him "the mysterious former law student" when discussing him as a suspect in a murder case. Furthermore, the adjectives "brilliant," "witty," "articulate," and "smart" were always peppered one way or another into either newspaper headlines or in the vocabulary of the reporter in the particular footage, demonstrating this odd fascination with focusing on him as this attractive individual rather than discussing his involvement in a murder trial (Berlinger, 2019).

One of the parts of the documentary that solidified this concept of the glorification of the White, decently wealthy, conventionally attractive perpetrator was especially evident in the fourth episode, which is focused on the case's verdict and Bundy's execution. After the court had imposed the death penalty on Bundy for his crimes in this trial, Judge Cowart gave Bundy a message, stating: "Take care of yourself, young man...Alright? I say that to you sincerely. It's a tragedy for this court to see such a total waste, I think, of humanity that I have experienced in this court. You're a bright young man. You'd have made a good lawyer, I'd love to have you practice in front of me, but you went another way, partner. Take care of yourself. I don't have any animosity towards you, I want you to know that," (Berlinger, 2019, 37:06). While media coverage has shown that news reporters and authors have often overlooked Bundy's crimes to focus on the aspects of him that they find attractive, it was utterly surprising and discouraging to see the Judge in charge

of his trial use such positive adjectives to describe, and even encourage, Bundy. Moreover, in the same episode, the former sheriff in charge of the case stated, "He was different. And he was smart. He was a challenge to the best," (Berlinger, 2019, 27:30). I felt that this was crucial to discuss because it is a clear illustration of the fascination that comes about with a White criminal, whose crimes can be heinous, yet if they are conventionally attractive, educated and have a decent status in society, can still be so glorified and romanticized, or even just spoken about with a hint of positivity, just the same as those involved in their case and trial. This Netflix documentary demonstrated that the media had a fascination with Bundy, taking time to discuss his aspirations, attractive looks, education, and personality, presenting him in a positive light, which are factors that are rarely, if ever, offered to perpetrators of color.

Wayne Williams

Atlanta's Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children was a fascinating documentary on the Max streaming platform. It was released in 2020, has a total of five episodes, and consists of footage from the news at the time of this dark part of Atlanta's history, news coverage of the victims, the trial, and interviews with individuals who knew Wayne Williams, the alleged killer of the 30 victims, as well as interviews with parents and family members of the victims. Similar to the Bundy documentary, it also includes images of newspaper clippings and voice-overs from news reporters and individuals involved in the trial, such as the prosecution and defense teams.

This documentary provided a stark outlook into a significant crime spree in which many young Black children were missing and murdered, totaling approximately 30 victims that are known. Through this documentary, it becomes apparent that the suspected perpetrator in this case, Williams, was not presented in half the positive light that Bundy was in the news. When considering news coverage and media representation, it must be made aware that the documentary showed that this case actually received a lot less media coverage at the time because of the fact that it was young Black children who were the victims. As a result of this victim demographic, the news did not frequently tell the story of these individuals or discuss this case because, at that time, the police were often refusing to believe that these Black children were missing, but rather making them out to be "runaways" and claiming that they were criminals in their own right because they must have been involved in drugs and/or prostitution.

When the news coverage of Williams is demonstrated in the documentary, it is shown that the newspaper clippings were far more focused on these crimes than Bundy's crimes, offering no outlook into Williams as an individual but rather making his alleged crimes the main headline. For example, the documentary shows in its third episode different images of newspaper clippings, including a New York Post headline after Williams was arrested, which states, "Atlanta Monster Seized," and a Daily News Report stating, "Jury to Probe Atlanta Slaying" with an accompanied picture of Williams in handcuffs. In the fourth episode of the documentary includes clippings that discuss how many "slayings" Williams was involved in, only discussing how many deaths he was linked to, never stating any personal information about Williams or his aspirations or history, but only mentioning his name and the amount of victims or crimes he was linked to at the time (Bennett et al., 2020).

As well as images of newspaper clippings, there were also statements about him, both from the news reports from the time and those from individuals who were interviewed for the documentary. Overall, there was a significant lack of anything remotely positive said about Williams. A former FBI agent who was involved in his case stated in his interview in the fifth and final episode of the documentary that Williams was "truly evil" and a "lunatic." Additionally, a news report from the media coverage at the time that really caught my interest was in the fourth episode of the documentary in which a voiceover from the news stated, "District Attorney Lewis Slayton had the last word, calling Wayne Williams 'cunning' and 'evil,' saying he's like 'Attila the Hun,' 'Adolf Hitler,' and 'Idi Amin,' believers in a master race all doing away with inferiors," (Bennett et al., 2020, 24:18). Similarly, the same episode included an individual from the Atlanta Police Department involved in the case who stated, "He's a narcissist. He's a predator motivated by whatever demons are inside his head to make him want to do this" (Bennett et al., 2020 16:55). This caught my interest because it was a clear representation of this purely one-sided representation in the news of a Black perpetrator who received no positive adjectives or mentions of his life before he was brought into the limelight for his alleged crimes, but rather the news was focused on discussing the statements which could further antagonize him to the public. None of the footage of the trial or news ever mentioned any details about Williams other than providing details that linked him to the victims, his name was only linked to an amount and to the words "murder," "slayings," or "victims." When discussing a man known to be meek and even-tempered by those who knew him, the news only focused on his "rage" and "violent outbursts" in court, demonstrating him once again in an exaggeratedly antagonistic light.

This case and how it was handled demonstrates a clear representation of race's role in the criminal justice system. From the beginning, the case and victims were not prioritized, even to the point where police officers accused the mothers themselves of murdering their children due to a lack of interest in the case paired with a negative perspective of the race of those involved. The victims received little to no attention from the police or the media until the mothers of the victims banded together to ensure that the justice system would get involved in these cases and pay attention to this growing epidemic of missing Black children in their communities. Additionally, the case is incredibly controversial due to the highly shared opinion that Williams may have committed some of the murders, yet not all of them, which means the police used Williams was the face of these Atlanta killings, closing the case far too soon. In the documentary itself, many of the victims' families felt that the true perpetrator had not been caught and that Williams may have been guilty of some of the charges, but not all of them. In addition, the last episode delves into the fear of a "race war," describing that one of the suspects in this case, who was strongly linked to one of the victims, was a well-known White male, Charles Sanders, who was a part of the Ku Klux Klan. While the same fibers and DNA evidence that led to the conviction of Williams were also found on Sanders, this evidence and suspect were dismissed very quickly due to the fear that if a relationship should be made solidified between these missing and murdered Black victims to the KKK, there would be a race war in Atlanta, which law enforcement was desperate to avoid. This is relevant to mention because it demonstrates this suspicion that Williams could have been used as a scapegoat for some of the murders due to his race in order to avoid this looming conflict (Bennett et al., 2020).

This documentary helped provide an outlook into the way the media and police handled the case of Black victims in poorer communities and a Black perpetrator, showing that because of the race of the perpetrator, the media only offered one perspective of Wayne Williams, and it was certainly not as congenial as it was of Ted Bundy.

O.J. Simpson

The third and final documentary that was pivotal for my research was the ESPN documentary, consisting of five episodes, streaming on Hulu, *O.J.:Made in America*. This documentary was incredibly significant due to the importance it gives race and wealth as facets that can complicate the case of a person of color. The very first episode of the documentary delves into the history of the relationship between race and the criminal justice system, describing the ongoing tension between Black individuals and the Los Angeles Police Department as a result of the neverending lack of justice and increasing police brutality. The directors take time to discuss this relationship to set a much-needed background that illustrates the vast media coverage that was provided to the O.J. Simpson case.

The content analysis of this documentary aided in finding results that demonstrated the multifaceted role that race plays in media coverage and the criminal justice system. The documentary showed that media coverage consisted of positive language when discussing Simpson, discussing his former career as a sports superstar, and mainly calling him by the title "American Hero." The discussion did include his personality, calling him smooth-talking, charming, and attractive when discussing his presentation in the court proceedings. In the provided images of newspaper and magazine clippings, as well as the news footage, they did not call Simspon an alleged murderer or mention, but rather made statements such as, "Probably this is the most famous American ever charged with murder," "An American Tragedy," and "Could this American sports hero possibly be a murderer?" Now, in this case, we see a lack of antagonizing words, such as "slayings" or "monster," and see them replaced with "hero" becausthe race variable remains same, but the status and privilege changes, which provides a clear distinction in the role class and wealth can play in the way media covers these cases.

In the documentary's third episode, a specific statement was made about the "slow chase" that occurred on Los Angeles highways when Simpson was being sought after as a fugitive of justice. Zoey Tur, a reporter, stated, "This was not usual police behavior. If OJ Simpson were black, this shit would not have happened. He'd be on the ground getting clubbed. But because he transcended race and color, to this exalted status of celebrity, he got a motorcade," (Edelman, 2016, 31:46). This apt statement truly put into words the thoughts I had while watching this documentary and witnessing the role the

privilege of wealth and celebrity status played in this case. Despite being a Black man, O.J. Simpson received this preferential treatment as a result of his wealth and societal standing, something the copious amounts of Black individuals in Los Angeles and around the globe were not privileged to because they did not have this abundant amount of money or high standing in society.

In addition, there was so much media coverage given to this case because of both the celebrity status of the alleged perpetrator as well as the race of the victims. The documentary included a news report in the fourth episode that stated, "On the three network newscasts, the Simpson story has been given more time in two months than any other topics this year" (Edelman, 2016). While the stories of police brutality and hundreds of Black victims were not a part of the news rotation, the Simpson case garnered such a significant amount of media coverage.

The documentary also delves into the previously mentioned historical context of the tense relationship between the Black community and the L.A.P.D as a result of so many years of racially driven conflict. What could be considered the most relevant case that contributed was that of Rodney King. In the second episode of the documentary, the deeply troubling case of Rodney King and police brutality, including the footage from the actual incident and the footage from the news and court proceedings of those involved, was presented to demonstrate the Black society's suffering at the hands of those who abused their power against them. This case was a notable contribution to the trial of O.J. Simpson because the documentary, and those within it, detail how the acquittal of Simpson and Black public rallying behind him through the duration of the case could have been majorly affected by the lack of justice that followed the police brutality against Rodney King, due to the fact that the cops involved were found not guilty. The fifth episode elaborates on this theory by using the phrase "payback for Rodney King," when discussing the fact that the Black community finally felt they had received a "win" when a Black man was found "not guilty" in a court proceeding. The documentary delves with great details that people were shocked that O.J. Simpson had become the face of a civil rights movement during his trial considering his obsession with "integration" into White society as he rose to fame, but this did not matter to the Black population of Los Angeles that had suffered for too long (Edelman, 2016).

Discussion

The above-stated findings within the three documentaries demonstrate that there is a proclivity for media representation to portray White perpetrators in a far more favorable light than Black perpetrators. The exception becomes apparent only when Black perpetrators are of a higher status and wealth. During the comparison of the language and themes in these documentaries, particularly that of Bundy's media representation and Williams', there was a clear distinction between way they were spoken of in the news, with the more positive language being associated with Bundy and cold "facts" with Williams. While Bundy received flattering words that described his personality and conventionally attractive looks, as well as his infamous charming and humorous persona, Williams' name was only linked to words describing "murders" and "slavings." On the other hand, Black perpetrators who have the privilege of wealth and celebrity status may find themselves obtaining more attention and positive media coverage that is less quick to antagonize and dehumanize them. One article describes, when explaining the "guard dog" perspective of media representation, that "This perspective argues that news stories get greater attention if they identify a phenomenon as an intruder or threat" (Dixon & Williams, 2014). In other words, this perspective offers insight into why media may represent these races differently because they gain more attention when they have this "phenomenon" of an entire race now presented as a threat through their overly antagonistic representation of them. In addition, it is not only the perpetrators that the media scrutinizes but the victims as well. In the previous section of this paper, I discussed how the young Black victims in Atlanta were often demonstrated negatively. Their disappearance was often explained away, given what was considered a "reasonable" explanation to justify this ignorance and lack of empathy for these missing children by stating that they were involved in drugs and prostitution, as well as the fact that they were runaways due to poverty. One research article stated, "Here, we propose that negative stereotypes portrayed in the media about Black victims may decrease their perceived social respectability, and consequently, play a significant role in opinions surrounding the incident and criminal proceedings" (Dukes & Gaither, 2017). In other words, this repetitive portrayal that feeds into negative stereotypes of Black victims often dehumanizes them and diminishes the attention that can be given to these cases. Simpson's case not only received so much coverage due to his privilege but also due to the fact that the victims of the case were both white, including a well-known White, blonde, and wealthy woman, Nicole Brown Simpson. Wright & Washington (2018) aptly stated, when discussing the issues of disparities in the way media portray different races and ethnicities in the media, "Thus, media portrayals not only shape views of crime and victims but, because of racial differences in the depictions of victimization, also might convey to the public that some lives matter more than others." The victim variable plays a large role in this analysis because it is yet another factor that demonstrates the complications of racial stereotypes and negative outlooks on ethnicities when it comes to media representation, as shown through research and the three documentaries used in this study.

Another aspect within the documentaries that stood out to me, in accordance with race and its relationship to media coverage, was that the media delved into how Williams was presented during his court proceedings. To elaborate, the third episode of Williams' documentary describes the excessive amount of police that were in charge of handling him, approximately 15 deputies, and were constantly with him (Bennett et al., 2020). On the other hand, Bundy was handled with far less security while he was in his court proceedings, one of which was emphasized in the third episode of the Netflix documentary that describes the large manhunt that followed his escape from custody. An escape that was possible due to a serious lack of security provisions. While Williams was surrounded by 15 deputies and handcuffed, Bundy was not being watched, nor was he handcuffed in the library of the court, allowing his escape. While this does not relate exactly tomedia representation focus, it does provide a perspective into the completely different security provisions that were utilized against the White perpetrator and the Black perpetrator.

When considering the various complicated facets that make up this research focus, I feel the need to discuss the different fictionalized versions of White perpetrators that the media often portrays in a romanticized manner. The most relevant at the moment could be considered the recent series *Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*, as well as *Monster: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story*, in which we see the dramatized versions of certain perpetrators who receive a platform in which their stories can be fictionalized and even provide them with a sympathetic backstory that acts a ploy to romanticize these individuals. These types of anthologies never extend to Black perpetrators because they receive minimal representation as is but would never receive that offer of sympathy and commiserate background. While this was a topic that I had wanted to mention because it demonstrates the different types of media representation that entail

discrepancies in the portrayal of race and its relationship to crime, it is a complicated subject that could be used for further research study.

The Role of Intersectionality

Throughout the Netflix documentary, it becomes apparent that Bundy's status in society, his high education and career aspirations allowed him to present as an unsuspecting perpetrator. As mentioned earlier, Bundy's name was often attached to his career aspirations as compared to the crimes that he was suspected of. His status in society as a middle class White man paired with his education in psychology, law, politics, as well as his career aspirations, painted him as this individual that could go undetected in his malicious behaviors. This well-educated and well-established status, paired with his race, allowed law enforcement, media and society to offer to Bundy a positive connotation and image despite the heinous crimes his names were attached to.

On the other hand, Williams was from a poorer community in Atlanta and his aspirations were more in line with freelance news and radio broadcasting. These aspirations were even used by law enforcement and media as ways of explaining how the victims may have been lured under false pretenses. Despite being called "intelligent," "nerdy," "bright," and an "A student" by individuals who knew him, as shown in the HBO documentary, media outlets never extended such descriptive, positive phrases to Williams. While expanding on James Baldwin's words on Williams, one article offered, "Whether or not Williams committed any crime, he is already guilty of something in the eyes of the state. This makes Williams a member, rather than an enemy, of Atlanta's Black community" (Thorsson, 2020). These apt words help describe the way the stereotypes that have existed in society of a Black man, especially that of one from a poorer neighborhood rather than an abundantly wealthy man like Simpson, had already painted a version of him to law enforcement and society before he even had a fighting chance.

In a similar fashion but with a different population, the way Bundy's victims were described according to their "good girl" personalities and dedication towards their education, something that was seamlessly used in their narratives due to the fact that they were often killed on or near their campuses. This demonstrates the White female victim selling to the media that often garners more attention than any other type of victims of crime. On the other

hand, the missing and murdered children in Atlanta had an age and a cause of death attached to their name, but no mention of their personalities or education. The only other characteristics accorded to the children were accusations of prostitution, drug trafficking and the label of the "runaway." One research article offered insight into the consequences of this stereotype, stating, "Media portrayals of crime, which often emphasize the young black male street criminal, may exacerbate the perceived threat posed by minority groups by linking minority populations with crime problems" (Wells, 2000). This quote in particular felt that it lined up with discussions of the Atlanta victims because it was apparent how the media coverage around their deaths was not the first, nor the last even in this day and age, to offer this unnecessary negative outlook into minority groups that can lead to the perception of their death as being related to consequences of their own engagement in criminal behavior, which in and of itself feeds into a stereotype that unfortunately continues to persist.

Race, while it is a strong factor in these situations, is not the only determining the treatment of perpetrators. contributing element in Socioeconomic status and wealth become extremely relevant, along with celebrity status, and almost surpass the role race plays as we see in the O.J. Simspon case in particular. As discussed previously, Simpson was offered various privileges and less strict treatment while being investigated, and even arrested, as a result of his wealth and high class standing as a beloved athlete. This was especially apparent against the backdrop of the racial tensions the Black community had with the LAPD at the time. Where other Black individuals were beaten by the police, most publicized in the case of Rodney King, Simpson was offered preferential treatment. One article states, "Although he had been charged with two brutal murders, the police made no effort to take Simpson into custody, instead, negotiating a "surrender" at a time and place of his choosing...Then, when he violated that agreement, the officers did not intervene by force; instead, they languidly escorted Simpson to his house and watched while he sat in his car for an hour, telephoned his mom, and drank a glass of orange juice," (Thernstrom & Fetter, 1996). The crime and victims seemed to be overlooked in favor of the beloved sports figure who was entangled in this investigation. His wealth and celebrity status surpassed his race, allowing him to be an example of the role societal standing plays in our perceptions, and the law enforcement's perceptions, and how these legal rules become laxer, as well as the privilege that gets bestowed upon them as a result of this. This also brings attention to the surprising support the Black community

had for Simpson throughout his pursuit and trial, given that he was this figure who seemed to distance himself from his racial identity, along with the preferential treatment he received as a result of this advantage that he had over them. However, this does become comprehensible when examining the substantial amount of tragedy surrounding the Black community's relationship with law enforcement for approximately their entire history of interactions. Black individuals saw an opportunity that they might finally achieve a "win" after a history of losses, hence their unbounding support to the face of what they hoped would set a new precedent in the way the Black community has been treated by law enforcement.

Media Coverage: Beneficial or Adverse Impacts?

Future Generations

After examining these documentaries, and their greater implications in our criminal justice system and society, the question arises regarding what impact such portrayals may leave on future generations of people of color. One journal article offered the outlook on these portrayals that, "The only they potentially provide are a triggering of negative contributions misconceptions that will be unconsciously and unjustifiably attached to these individuals," (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). In other words, if not done with caution and if this pattern of stereotypes in the news persists, this negative connotation against Black perpetrators and the glorification of White perpetrators, these renderings can continue to lead to people of color viewing themselves in this negative light that is constantly reinforced by what they see in the media, especially news platforms. Additionally, Dixon (2017) provides insight into the overall consequences these negative portraits could have in our society through an explanation of how people will be influenced by stereotypical misconceptions and this will shape their views on laws and politics as well. Both of these consequences as a result of the public's perceptions of media consumption demonstrate that if these stereotypical depictions continue, future generations of people of color will be forced to view constant repetitions of the way they are viewed by society and the criminal justice system, which can only cause them caution, hesitancy and distrust towards law enforcement.

An Unhealthy True Crime Obsession

When looking for documentaries that would substantiate the ideas for this research paper, it became all too apparent what an abundance of entertainment there is under the "True Crime" genre. Even the idea that one could reduce the stories of real people, real events and the loss of others into a form of entertainment illustrates a problem in and of itself. While the entertainment platform analyzed for the purpose are documentaries, more and more frequently do we see fictionalized versions of true events in the criminal justice system that become exaggerated and dramatized in a manner that allows for viewers to forget that what they are viewing are real events and not to be taken lightly. One article aptly explained,

The recognition of a documentary comes from the viewer's 'knowledge' that what they are watching is a law documentary... the viewer's understanding that what they are watching falls within their own definition of a documentary is essential to the documentary form. (Morton, 2021). In other words, most of the time, audiences engage in watching a documentary with the awareness that while it may be for entertainment purposes, it is an informative piece that they are seeking to expand their knowledge of. On the other hand, when engaging in the viewing of TV shows that dramatize true crime stories, and in which writers and directors may take too many liberties with retelling a true event, audiences may forget the severity of what they are consuming. It is important to consider the consequence of this casual desensitization towards real individuals and their real stories can impact the way they view situations in their own lives and the lives of others. In one article, the author described, "Our use of, and response to, programmes of a hybrid nature may both influence our public knowledge of social matters and our emotional, interpersonal understanding of life," (Bondebjerg, 1996). The media we consume has an impact on our perceptions of the public and how we go about our lives and therefore more attention should be brought to the fact that true crime has become a genre that can often exploit real stories and those who create these TV shows and films may take too many liberties in telling another's story. Additionally, if done incorrectly, the crime itself and the perpetrators become romanticized to the point where people are expected to "root" for these individuals.

Conclusion

In this paper, I used the content analysis method to delve into three different documentaries to examine the relationship between the criminal justice system and race, as demonstrated through the available media coverage. A significant critique must be made regarding how the media represents race and the criminal justice system, as well as the impact this has on societal perceptions of these variables. As previously mentioned, an idea for future research would be exploring media representation in the fictionalized genre, such as TV and movie representations of infamous White perpetrators, in a manner that is not extended to Black perpetrators. Media misrepresentation of race, victims, and crimes has an overall impact on how individuals view and feel about the criminal justice system. The narratives we witness through media often shape our perspectives and can drive our opinions; therefore, it is important that negative racial stereotypes and disparities in portrayals of crimes involving people of color, whether as perpetrators or victims, do not occur and slant our perspectives.

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