Race, gender, and the newsworthiness of homicide incidents

Jeff Gruenewald, Jesenia Pizarro, Steven M. Chermak *

School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, 560 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, United States

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the criteria news media use to evaluate the newsworthiness of homicide incidents occurring between the years of 1997 to 2005. By examining how particular race, gender, and race/gender intersections of offender-victim combinations affect news coverage decision-making, this study attempted to identify the most important criteria of newsworthiness. This article contributes to the growing body of newsworthiness of crime research by examining how cultural typification of victims and offenders affects news media coverage of homicides in Newark, New Jersey, a unique research location in which Blacks make up the majority of the population and Hispanics are the dominant population minority. The results provide partial support for Lundman's (2003) conclusion that cultural typification based on race and gender is an important criterion of newsworthiness.

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Introduction

It is nearly impossible to escape crime imagery in the news media. Scholars have found that crime is generally a staple of news programming, comprising from 10 to 50 percent of all news stories (Chermak, 1995; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991; Graber, 1980; Klite, Bardwell, & Salzman, 1997; Maguire, Sandage, & Weatherby, 1999; Yanich, 2005). In addition, not all crime is presented similarly by the news media. In particular, research has consistently shown that crime is distorted in favor of uncommon events (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1991; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1973). This same research has generally found that violent crimes such as homicides, for instance, are overrepresented while minor, more common crimes are ignored or de-emphasized. Consequently, research examining media coverage of crime, particularly homicide, has increased in recent years (Buckler & Travis, 2005; Johnstone, Hawkins, & Michener, 1995; Lundman, 2003; Paulsen, 2003; Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson, & Ackerly, 2004; Pritchard, 1985; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Sorenson, Manz, & Berk, 1998; Weiss & Chermak, 1998; Wilbanks, 1984). Despite such increased attention, an empirical void remains in the literature regarding the factors that contribute to the decision-making process of whether to cover, and how much to cover, a particular homicide incident.

To date, few studies (i.e., Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Lundman, 2003; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997) have seriously considered how the gender and race of homicide victims and offenders, and their interaction, affect news media selection and prominence decisions, and whether these interactions supersede incident characteristics in increasing the

newsworthiness of a particular homicide. Therefore, the question of what newsworthiness criteria are most important in shaping news media decisions on how to cover homicide occurrences remains unanswered. Moreover, the examination of gender and race/ethnicity interactions in this area of research is nonexistent. Previous studies have concentrated on racial categories (i.e., White and Black), and in doing this, have ignored ethnic groups such as Hispanics. Consequently, it is currently unknown whether Hispanic ethnicity is important in shaping news media decision making.

The scholarly understanding of newsworthiness criteria is important for several reasons. First, examining how homicide victim and offender characteristics affect news media coverage decisions is a step toward understanding the construction of homicide as a social problem. Second, the public generally has limited direct experience with crime and depends primarily on news media for information about crime and the response to crime by criminal justice agencies (Surette, 1998; Yanich, 2005). Therefore, news media's emphasis on particular types of homicides and neglect of others could affect public perceptions and fear of crime, and in turn, lead the public to support punitive criminal justice policy alternatives. Moreover, emphasizing homicides involving offenders and victims that align with dominant race/ethnic and gender stereotypes, and neglecting those that conflict with such stereotypes, may serve to reinforce prejudiced social structures, ideologies, and social practices (Meyers, 1997).

This study examined the relationship between homicide participant and incident characteristics and news media decision-making in the city of Newark, New Jersey over a nine-year period (1997 to 2005). One research question was posed: what homicide characteristics most contribute to the newsworthiness of homicide occurrences? In answering this question, this study employed data from the Newark Police Department's Homicide Squad and linked actual homicide occurrences with their respective media coverage in order to identify what types of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 517 355 2210; fax: +1 517 432 1787.
E-mail address: chermak@msu.edu (S.M. Chermak).

homicide characteristics lead to increased news coverage and what types lead to less coverage. Additionally, this study evaluated both relative frequency and "cultural typification" based on race/ethnic and gender stereotypes as two important and substantively different criteria of newsworthiness. In doing this, race/ethnicity was disaggregated in order to examine homicides involving Hispanics. An examination of this sort is imperative for the literature because it is currently unknown whether Hispanic ethnicity is important in shaping news media decision making.

Theoretical orientation

The construction of crime news stories

When crime is abundant, news personnel decide what crimes to cover and what crimes to ignore based on their newsworthiness (Chermak, 1995; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987; Surette, 1998). Surette (1998, p. 60) defined newsworthiness as "…the criteria by which news producers choose which of all known events are to be presented to the public as news events." Journalists' assessments of newsworthiness are shaped by several factors, such as audience preferences and the newsroom culture. In order to sell news, news media emphasize stories that are graphic and violent crimes because such stories are preferred by audiences (Gans, 1979; Kaniss, 1991). Reporters also learn what is newsworthy by socializing with experienced reporters and editors. News workers teach young reporters how to evaluate the news-worthiness of an event by excluding or de-emphasizing particular news stories (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989).

Organizational policies and practices also shape reporters' shared understanding of newsworthiness (Chermak, 1995; Gans, 1979; Tuch-man, 1973). The news organization's goal of producing news efficiently shapes how reporters define newsworthiness (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1991; Sherizen, 1978). Chermak (1995, p. 24), for example, showed how reporters "…rely on sources that are easily established and accessible, and abide by whatever organizational policy might be in place that govern their behavior." One way crime beat reporters become more efficient at their job is to streamline or "routinize" the process of crime news production by developing close relationships with contacts within the criminal justice system that consistently provide them with reliable information about crimes (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989; Gans, 1979; Surette, 1998; Tuchman, 1973). These relationships do not only serve the interest of media outlets, but also those of the criminal justice agencies (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994). Finally, past research has suggested that journalists' shared understanding of newsworthiness is shaped by the ideological persuasions of news organizations, as well as the ideological views of their sources (Cohen & Young, 1981; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989; Fishman, 1980; Grabosky & Wilson, 1989). Ericson et al. (1987) illustrated the complex nature of evaluating newsworthiness, as well as the subjectivity involved in news media decision-making:

> "[t]he journalist visualizes newsworthiness on the bases of his knowledge of social organization (material resources, rules, and relationships in his own newsroom and in his sources' organizations) and cultural organization (working and occupational ideologies in his own newsroom and in his sources' organizations and the dominant ideology in society). These multi-factor judgments are made situationally and contextually, and can shift repeatedly in the course of choosing a frame, deciding upon sources, interviewing sources, and writing, editing, and slottering a story." (p. 139).

Race, gender, and decision-making

Often overlooked in examinations of newsworthiness criteria is the role that the cultural typification of victims and offenders plays in news decision-making (for exceptions, see Lundman, 2003; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). It may be possible, however, to borrow from other relevant criminological research in order to speculate how stereotypes based on offender and victim statuses could affect decisions about news coverage. In particular, a number of studies had emphasized how the public and criminal justice practitioners rely on common racial stereotypes or "scripts" of violent crimes and criminals to process crime news. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) found that the public generally assumes crime suspects are non-White even when the suspect's race is not reported in the news. Research has also revealed that police depend on "implicit" racial stereotypes of "real" criminals when making arrest decisions (Beckett, Nyrop, & Pfingst, 2006), and court officials rely on race-based stereotypes of criminals to make case processing decisions (Steen, Engen, & Gainey, 2005). Therefore, it appears that at every step in the process, from when victims and offenders first come under the purview of police to when their stories are read about in the daily newspaper, they are being categorized as typical or atypical crime participants based on their race, gender, and class statuses.

Another growing body of criminological research that may also help explain how news decision-makers typify offenders and victims is the research on the intersections of race and gender (see Barak, Leighton, & Flavin, 2007; Daly, 1997). This research attempts to move beyond treating race and gender, as only separate statuses, and instead, works toward examining the complex intersections between them in particular contexts (Anderson & Collins, 2001). Rather than viewing race and gender as having an additive relationship, race and gender are conceptualized as having a multiplicative relationship with unique effects on particular criminal justice outcomes. This approach allows for theorizing on how race and gender can independently affect evaluations of crime victims and offenders, and at the same time, allows for theorizing on how each status contextualizes the effects of other statuses in ways that might better reflect cultural typification processes.

Recently, some criminologists have advocated for the adoption of the intersections or "multiple inequalities" approach to address a number of crime and criminal justice topics (Barak et al., 2007; Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Daly, 1997; Schwartz & Milovanovic, 1996). Scholars have recognized the importance of incorporating multiple methodological approaches, including quantitative analysis, when studying race and gender intersections (Simpson & Gibbs, 2006). As an example, one study examined how intersections of race, gender, and age affected sentencing decisions and found that young Black males were sentenced most harshly of any race-gender-age group, while controlling for other important variables such as defendant's prior record and mode of conviction (Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998). Importantly, Steffensmeier et al. (1998) found that the effects of statuses, such as race, on sentencing outcomes were contingent upon other defendant statuses. For instance, race was shown to be most influential on sentencing decision-making for younger males, thus emphasizing the need to consider the intersections of race and age. In short, past research has shown that statuses such as race, gender, and race-gender intersections affect typification processes of both the public and criminal justice officials. As a result, this study posited that similar typification processes are relevant for news media evaluations of homicide newsworthiness. That is, cultural typification, rooted in racial and gendered stereotypes, are relied upon by news decision-makers to evaluate the news value of particular homicide occurrences based on homicide victim and offender attributes. Past studies also suggested that in some cases, such stereotyping based on participant social statuses may be more important than especially novel incident characteristics in shaping evaluations of newsworthiness (e.g., Lund-man, 2003). In doing so, this study attempted to integrate the construction of crime news approach with the multiple inequalities perspective in order to provide a more comprehensive explanation for variations in how news media make coverage decisions.

Prior research

Prior studies had shown that not all homicides are considered equally newsworthy, and that there is variation in the extent of coverage homicides receive from news organizations. Some homicides are not covered by the news media, while some are given a two-paragraph overview, and others are front-page stories that are covered extensively. When all crimes are similarly serious, what other factors influence how events are covered and described in the news? One way to better understand how news media assess the newsworthiness of homicide occurrences is to identify the relevant criteria of news-worthiness used to decide what incidents to report and what incidents to de-emphasize or ignore.

Scholars who have studied the presentation of homicide in the news media have traditionally relied on content analysis to examine how news media represent crimes, as well as crime victims and suspects. When employing this method, researchers sample stories from various news media, code the representation of various characteristics, and then reach conclusions about the characteristics of crime, victims, and defendants presented. By comparing represen-tations of crime to general crime statistics, scholars who have used this method suggest that in some instances news media misrepresent or distort the homicide problem, as well as suggest how such distortions may affect public perceptions of crime.

More recently, a select few scholars have relied on a somewhat different approach to studying media representations of crime, which this study referred to as *media distortion analysis*. This approach involves linking crime incidents occurring in one particular city to their respective local news media coverage. By starting with a list or "universe" of crime occurrences, scholars compare the elements of crime occurrences that receive news media coverage with those that do not (see Pritchard, 1985). Johnstone et al. (1995) provided an early example of this innovative approach. These researchers had access to data from the Chicago Police Department, and then examined what events were presented in two Chicago newspapers (the *Tribune* and *Sun-Times*). By focusing on the relationship between particular elements of crime occurrences and news media decisions to cover crime stories, this approach allowed scholars to get a better sense of what criteria news media use to evaluate the newsworthiness of crime occurrences.

Homicide newsworthiness

To date, two common themes that in some cases appear contra-dictory emerge from past research on news media coverage of homicide occurrences.[1] The first theme centers on the proposition that rare types of homicides, or homicide occurrences involving rare elements, are more likely to be selected for news media coverage than commonly occurring types of homicides. Past studies had found that several unusual homicide characteristics are significantly related to news media decision-making. For instance, homicides involving multiple victims (Johnstone et al., 1995; Paulsen, 2003; Peelo et al., 2004; Sorenson et al., 1998; Wilbanks, 1984), White victims (Johnstone et al., 1995; Lundman, 2003; Paulsen, 2003; Peelo et al., 2004; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Sorenson et al., 1998; Weiss & Chermak, 1998), vulnerable victims (Johnstone et al., 1995; Paulsen, 2003; Peelo et al., 2004; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Sorenson et al., 1998), and homicides that occur in relatively wealthy neighborhoods (Johnstone et al., 1995; Paulsen, 2003; Sorenson et al., 1998) were more likely to receive news media attention.

Studies had also shown that the rarity of the type of homicide not only influences whether the incident is covered by the news, but also the amount of coverage the incident receives (Buckler & Travis, 2005; Peelo et al., 2004; Sorenson et al., 1998; Weiss & Chermak, 1998). Sorenson et al. (1998), for instance, found that homicides involving female, especially young, and elderly victims in Los Angeles received

increased amounts of print news media attention (Sorenson et al., 1998, p. 1511). Similarly, Weiss and Chermak (1998) found that homicides involving White victims in Indianapolis received more news media attention than homicides involving Black victims, despite homicides involving Black victims being more common. Paulsen (2003) found that occurrences involving multiple suspects received increased amounts of news media attention. Finally, a study by Peelo et al. (2004, p. 269) that examined selection bias in national print news coverage of homicides in England and Wales also found that some types of homicide occurrences involving rare circumstances (e.g., sexually motivated homicides) received disproportionately more news media coverage.

The second theme emerging from this literature contradicts the idea that homicide coverage is determined solely by the novelty of the circumstances surrounding the incident. Specifically, scholars posit that homicide occurrences involving non-stereotypical offenders and victims, despite being statistically rare, receive significantly less media attention when other important homicide characteristics are held constant. By focusing on homicide participants' race and gender, and combinations of race and gender, two studies examining media news coverage of specific homicide occurrences advanced knowledge about the important criterion of newsworthiness. One study by Pritchard and Hughes (1997), for instance, found that although Milwaukee homicides involving female suspects occurred relatively infrequently, such homicides received significantly less news media attention than homicides involving male suspects. They maintained that, rather than statistical deviance, two other criteria of newsworthiness—status of homicide participants and the cultural deviance of homicide acts—affect journalists' selection decisions more than relative frequency. First, they argued that homicides involving crime participants of higher status (White, wealthy males would be considered the benchmark of high status) should receive more news coverage than homicides involving participants of lower status (Pritchard & Hughes, 1997, p. 51). Second, homicides deemed as increasingly "culturally deviant," or those homicides which strongly went against dominant ideals (the murder of a child or elderly person would be considered to have high cultural deviance) should receive increased amounts of news media coverage (pp. 51-52). In short, Pritchard and Hughes (1997, pp. 63–64) found that the social status of homicide participants to be better, more accurate predictors of selection bias than relative frequency.

In another study, Lundman (2003) examined selection bias in newspaper coverage of Columbus homicides occurring between 1984 and 1992 and found that relative frequency was an inadequate criterion of newsworthiness. He argued that homicides involving victims and offenders who did not conform to stereotypical profiles of crime participants failed to adhere to commonly used and understood crime "scripts" or narratives (see also Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). In effect, homicide occurrences involving non-stereotypical victims and offenders received only average or significantly less news media coverage (Lundman, 2003). For instance, although homicide incidents involving female and White offenders were uncommon, they failed to receive increased news media attention (Lundman, 2003). Moreover, Lundman examined how victim and offender race and sex combina-tions affected news media selection and prominence decisions (see Pritchard & Hughes, 1997, pp. 59-60). By doing so he found, for example, that uncommon types of homicide involving White female offenders and White male victims (White male-on-White male) received only average amounts of news attention, while other types of uncommon homicides aligning better with stereotypical race and gender typification (e.g., Black male-on-White female) received significantly more news coverage (Lundman, 2003).

In sum, past research on the newsworthiness of homicides had found that both novelty and cultural typification to be important influences on newsmaker decision-making about the prominence and salience of homicide stories. To be clear, findings indicating the

importance of cultural typification as a criterion of newsworthiness do not necessarily negate the findings of other studies that revealed novelty to be important. Instead, studies like Pritchard and Hughes (1997) and Lundman (2003), by more closely examining the role of race/ethnicity and gender-based cultural typification of homicide participants, revealed that novelty only goes so far in explaining newsmaker decision-making and that research needs to consider other nuanced criteria of newsworthiness.

The present study

This study examined newspaper coverage of all homicides occurring in Newark, New Jersey between 1997 and 2005. News media coverage of homicides over a number of years was examined in order to control for fluctuations in news coverage as well as fluctuations in the number of homicide occurrences. Similar to previous research on selection bias in the news coverage of homicides, a media distortion analysis methodology that links the total number of homicide occurrences in a municipality to news media accounts of each homicide was employed.

The present inquiry built on previous research in several ways. First, this study examined how victim and offender race/ethnicity and gender, and other homicide variables operate in a substantively unique socio-geographic context. In particular, this article focuses on news media decision-making in Newark, a midsize northeastern city in which the majority of the population is Black and the dominant population minority group is Hispanic. Newark has also many other social structural characteristics (i.e., poverty and prevalence of violence) that distinguish it from other cities that have been examined in previous media studies.

Second, instead of dichotomizing ethnicity into Black and White groups like previous studies (i.e., Lundman, 2003), this study disaggregated race/ethnicity in order to examine homicides involving Hispanics. Past research had focused primarily on cultural typification of White and Black victims and offenders. Missing from the homicide in the news media literature is how typification of other race or ethnic groups, such as Hispanics, serves as a criterion for assessing the newsworthiness of homicide incidents. Past homicide research has dealt with Hispanic victims and offenders by grouping them with Blacks into a "minority" race category or by excluding them from statistical analyses altogether (Lundman, 2003; Lundman, Douglass, & Hanson, 2004; Martinez & Lee, 1999).[2] Nonetheless, Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007), and some U.S. cities, like Newark, have increasingly large Hispanic populations, making them the dominant population minority.

Undertaking this approach is necessary because in cities where the Hispanic population is increasingly large, homicide victims and offenders could provoke a cultural typification that is unique from Black victims and offenders. For instance, although research is limited, some studies have suggested that the media tend to link social issues of recent immigration and current Hispanic populations with increased crime (Mann & Zatz, 1998; Martinez & Lee, 1998). In addition, some have argued that mass media perpetuate negative stereotypes of Hispanics, such as being aggressive, prone to violence, or lazy (Castro, 1998; Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Marin, 1984). Indeed, Chiricos and Eschholz (2002, p. 416) found that "…criminal typification of Hispanics is both stronger and more consistent than it is for Blacks." Based on the "social threat hypothesis" (Blalock, 1967; Liska, 1992), they hypothesized that Hispanics may in the future replace Blacks as the most pressing social threat in some U.S. cities (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002, p. 417). Consequently, it is imperative to examine whether homicides involving Hispanics are more prominently portrayed in the news. This study was able to hypothesize about how alternative cultural typification (racist and sexist stereotypes) of Hispanics as a unique social group may factor into news media evaluations of homicide newsworthiness.

Third, in addition to examining race/ethnicity and gender independently, this study also examined the effects of the intersections between these statuses on news media decision-making, net the effects of all other variables. That is, this study conceptualized ethnicity and gender as contingent statuses that may be operating interdependently to affect evaluations of homicide newsworthiness. Although Lundman (2003) employed this approach in his research, this was the first study to focus on intersections of ethnicity and gender in a city where Blacks are the majority and Hispanics are the dominant population minority.

Finally, the universe of homicide incidents for this study came from an exceptionally rich data source, which allowed for the consideration of a number of control variables that could potentially influence selection bias. In addition to commonly included control variables, such as victim and offender age, race, and sex, this study built on past research by considering potentially important variables that were often not included in past research. For instance, this study controlled for the prior deviant behavior of victims and offenders. This study also controlled for the influence of the motive or circumstances surrounding specific homicide incidents (i.e., domestic, drug/gang, interpersonal dispute, robbery, and other motive) on news media selection bias. Finally, only a few past studies had controlled for the number of homicide victims involved in each homicide occurrence (Johnstone et al., 1995; Paulsen, 2003; Weiss & Chermak, 1998), which was included in this study as a theoretically important control variable. Controlling for variables such as these that have been many times neglected by past research allowed the researchers to better identify the unique effects of homicide participant characteristics on news media selection bias and further knowledge of how journalists' evaluate the newsworthiness of homicides.

Research question and hypotheses

This study focused on answering the following research question: *what homicide characteristics most contribute to the newsworthiness of homicide occurrences?* Based on the previous scholarly literature on crime newsworthiness and selection bias in homicide news coverage, this study expected to find that a number of homicide characteristics would affect news media selection and prominence decisions. There are essentially two types of homicide characteristics, participant-level characteristics and incident-level characteristics, which news media consider when assessing the newsworthiness of a homicide occurrence. Participant characteristics consist of offender and victim demographic characteristics (i.e., ethnicity, age, and sex) and participant deviant behaviors (i.e., prior arrests), which reflect the social status of offenders and victims. Incident characteristics are elements of the incident itself, such as the number of victims and offenders involved in an incident or where an incident occurs.

In this study, the focus was on how the race/ethnicity and gender of homicide participants (i.e., victims and offenders) affect news media selection and prominence decisions, while controlling for other important incident characteristics. The idea that homicides involving atypical offenders and victims should necessarily receive more news media attention because they occur relatively infrequently was refuted. Instead, this study hypothesized, like Lundman's (2003), that unusual homicide participant characteristics significantly affect news media decision-making when they align or conflict with cultural stereotypes of crime victims and offenders. It was hypothesized that not all homicides involving statistically rare offender-victim race combinations will receive increased news media attention compared to the most common Black-on-Black homicide. Moreover, it was hypothesized that cultural typification of victims and offenders will significantly affect news media evaluations of newsworthiness.

Method and data

Research site

Newark is a midsize northeastern city located in the state of New Jersey. It is the home of approximately 274,000 people, with a majority of residents (approximately 82 percent) of African American or Hispanic ethnic origin (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). The city has many social problems, approximately 25 percent of its residents live below the poverty line, 8 percent of all the residents sixteen years and older are unemployed, and 17 percent of the families with children are female-headed (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Newark also has problems of social disorganization. Over 75 percent of the homes are not owner occupied and 9 percent of the residences are vacant. In addition to the macro-level problems, there are also issues pertaining to violence. The city is one of the most violent municipalities in the state with an average rate of approximately 28 homicides per 100,000 residents (from 1997 to 2005), while the New Jersey homicide rate was 4.1 and the national average rate was 5.8 during this same time period.

Data

The analysis portion of this study was based on two sources of data. The first source of data consisted of information about homicide incidents gathered from Newark Police Department (NPD) homicide investigation files. These files contained rich detail about the homicide incident (i.e., date, time, incident address, premise, motive, weapon used, relationship between victim and offender), victim (i.e., demographic information, employment status, gang affiliation, past criminal history), and offender(s) (i.e., demographic information, employment status, gang affiliation, past criminal history). A data collection protocol and instrument helped ensure that researchers captured this information in a consistent manner.

The second source of data consisted of all newspaper articles written about each homicide occurrence in *The Star-Ledger*, the state of New Jersey's leading daily newspaper and local newspaper for Newark. The newspaper is owned by the Newhouse family, and it is published by Advance Publication Incorporated. The readership of the paper is predominantly suburban. The *Star-Ledger* was chosen for this study over other local newspapers because it is by far the most widely read newspaper in Newark and the surrounding areas, with over 300,000 readers daily (BurrellesLuce, 2007).[3]

The design for this study allowed the researchers to link specific homicides to all news articles that might have been written about them in the local newspaper. Information from homicide files, such as names of homicide victims and offenders, functioned as key words that were input into *Access World News* from *NewsBank,* an on-line searchable data base that provides access to all *The Star-Ledger* news stories since 1996. Searching for homicide news coverage in the on-line news archive made it possible to identify which homicide occurrences received news media attention and which were ignored by the news media. For those homicides that were covered by *The Star-Ledger*, all articles were collected and a number of content categories were coded in order to capture how prominently homicide news stories were displayed.

The unit of analysis for this study was the homicide incident. A small number of incidents that would not necessarily be considered homicides, such as vehicular homicides, were included in the data set because they were initially considered homicides by police, and thus, also by crime reporters. Overall, the data consisted of 664 homicide incidents that occurred from January 1, 1997 to December 31, 2005. Twenty-nine (4 percent) of these incidents had multiple homicide victims.[4] Due to the unit of analysis being the homicide incident and the scarcity of cases that had multiple victims, only the information of the first victim identified by police in these incidents was used in the

analyses. Given the research questions posed, and similar to Lundman (2003), the present inquiry focused only on the 505 homicides in the data set where there was an identified offender.[5]

Measures

Dependent variables

News media selection and prominence decisions were measured with two dependent variables. The first dependent variable was binary-coded and measured whether or not a homicide was covered by *The Star-Ledger* (1 = covered, 0 = not covered,). Approximately 62 percent of the homicides examined were covered by *The Star-Ledger* between 1997 and 2005. Consistent with past research, this study also examined the number of news articles written about each homicide incident. The number of articles was a measure of how prominently a homicide was covered compared to other Newark homicides occurring during the same time period. Specifically, each news story was categorized based on the primary focus of the story's content. For the purpose of this study, the newspaper articles collected and analyzed were stories specifically addressing the homicide occurrence, or in other words, the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the incident throughout the criminal justice process. An average of 1.29 "specific" news articles were written about the incidents examined. Other dependent variable measures were considered in the beginning stages of the project to capture the extent and prominence of homicide news coverage in Newark. For instance, number of words written specifically about each homicide (extent) and whether or not the homicide story appeared on the front page (another measure of prominence) were considered. In the end, however, the cover/not covered and specific articles results were presented in order to be consistent with previous research that explored race-gender combinations (Lundman, 2003).[6]

Independent variables

The primary interest of this study lay in variables that measured the combinations of race/ethnicity and gender homicide offender and victim characteristics.[7] In order to examine whether the ethnic typification of Hispanics as a unique social group factor into news media evaluations of homicide newsworthiness, this study separated Black, Hispanic, White, and other race/ethnic categories and created new offender-victim race and race-gender combinations to examine the effects of the combination variables on news media decision-making. Table 1 lists the various combinations for offender-victim race and gender combinations. All of the potential combinations based on Newark homicides occurring between 1997 and 2005 are listed, though not all were included in this study. Similar to Lundman (2003), only race/ethnic and race/ethnic-gender combinations that had a cell size of ten or more incidents were considered. As a result, a number of offender-victim race/ethnic and gender combinations, including those involving White homicide participants were excluded from the study. Combination variable 1 considered offender-victim race/ethnic characteristics. By far the most common type of offender-victim ethnic combination was Black-on-Black (78 percent), followed by Hispanic on Hispanic (8 percent), Black on Hispanic (6.5 percent), and Hispanic on Black (3.2 percent). Twelve potential dummy variables were created, and the Black-on-Black offender variable was designated as the reference category. Of the twelve potential combinations, eight were excluded from the analyses due to small cell size (i.e., Black on White, White on White, Black on other race, Hispanic on White, White on Black, White on Hispanic, other race on Black, and other race on Hispanic).

The effects of race/ethnicity and gender were further examined by combining both the ethnic and gender of Black and non-Black offenders and victims. This resulted in twenty-three dummy-coded potential variables measuring offender-victim race-gender combinations (see Table 1). Homicides involving Black male offenders on Black

Table 1
Offender/victim race/ethnicity and gender combination by dependent variables* (N = 505)

Variables	N (%)	% covered	Mean specific articles
Combination 1			
Black on Black**	394 (78.0)	60	1.26
Hispanic on Hispanic	41 (8.1)	73	1.24
Black on Hispanic	33 (6.5)	61	1.21
Hispanic on Black	16 (3.2)	81	0.88
Black on White	7 (1.4)	71	1.86
White on White	6 (1.2)	67	0.67
Black on other race	2 (.40)	50	1.00
Hispanic on White	2 (.40)	100	10.00
White on Black	1 (.20)	--	--
White on Hispanic	1 (.20)	100	3.00
Other race on Black	1 (.20)	--	--
Other race on Hispanic	1 (.20)	100	9.00
Combination 2			
Black male on Black male**	327 (64.8)	61	1.37
Black male on Black female	47 (9.3)	62	0.83
Hispanic male on Hispanic male	31 (6.1)	74	0.81
Black male on Hispanic male	27 (5.3)	63	1.04
Black female on Black male	17 (3.4)	53	0.47
Hispanic male on Black male	15 (3.0)	80	0.73
Hispanic male on Hispanic female	7 (1.4)	71	3.00
Black male on Hispanic female	6 (1.2)	50	2.00
Black male on White male	6 (1.2)	67	1.00
Black female on Black female	3 (.60)	33	1.00
White male on White female	3 (.60)	33	0.33
Hispanic female on Hispanic female	3 (.60)	67	1.67
Black male on other race male	2 (.40)	50	1.00
White male on White male	2 (.40)	100	--
White male on Black male	1 (.20)	--	--
Black male on White female	1 (.20)	100	7.00
White male on Hispanic female	1 (.20)	100	3.00
White female on White female	1 (.20)	100	1.00
Hispanic male on Black female	1 (.20)	100	3.00
Hispanic male on White male	1 (.20)	100	19.00
Hispanic male on White female	1 (.20)	100	1.00
Other male on Black male	1 (.20)	--	--
Other male on Hispanic female	1 (.20)	100	9.00

*It is important to again note that race/ethnic-gender combinations that had cell sizes of less than ten were excluded from the multivariate analysis (see Lundman, 2003).
**Reference category.

male victims made up approximately 65 percent of all occurrences, and served as the omitted reference category. The second most common ethnic and gender combination was that of Black male on Black female (9.3 percent), followed by Hispanic male on Hispanic male (6.1 percent), Black male on Hispanic male (5.3 percent), Black female on Black male (3.4 percent), and Hispanic male on Black male (3 percent). Similar to Lundman (2003), in these analyses only race/ethnic and race/ethnic-gender combinations that had a cell size of ten or more incidents were considered. By considering only these race and gender combinations, a number of offender-victim race/ethnic and gender combinations, including those involving White homicide participants and females were excluded from the study (i.e., Hispanic male on Hispanic female, Black male on Hispanic female, Black male on White male, Black female on Black female, White male on White female, Hispanic female on Hispanic female, Black male on other race male, White male on White male, White male on Black male, Black male on White female, White male on Hispanic female, White female on White female, Hispanic male on Black female, Hispanic male on White male, Hispanic male on White female, other male on Black male, and other male on Hispanic female).

Control variables

In addition to the combination variables of primary interest, a number of control variables were considered that measured incident and participant characteristics (see Table 2).[8] In terms of participant characteristics, race, gender, age, and deviant lifestyle were considered. Race for both offenders and victims was measured with a

nominal variable (1 = Black, 2 = White, 3 = Hispanic, and 4 = other). Approximately 86 percent of offenders and 82 percent of the victims were Black. Consequently, Blacks served as the reference category. The gender of victims and offenders was measured with a dichotomous variable (1 = male, 0 = female). Ninety-five percent of the offenders and 85 percent of victims were male. Age of both victims and offenders was measured using a continuous variable. The average age for offenders was twenty-six, while the average age for victims was approximately thirty. Finally, for both victims and offenders a deviant lifestyle scale ranging from 0 to 4 was used to measure involvement in illegal activities. This scale was based on criminal record, involvement in the drug business, a gang, and/or other illegal activities (e.g., prostitution, gambling). If a victim or offender did not have a criminal history and was not involved in any illegal activities, a value of 0 was assigned. Conversely, if he/she had a criminal history and engaged in the remaining three indicators, a 4 was assigned. On average, Newark offenders scored a 1.7 in the scale, while victims scored 1.3.

In terms of incident variables, weapon used to commit the murder, number of victims killed in the incident, motive, and whether a homicide occurred before or after the September 11 terrorist attacks were considered. Homicide weapon was coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = gun, 0 = other weapon). Approximately 64 percent of homicides were carried out with a gun. Number of homicide victims was measured as a continuous variable. On average, homicides in Newark involved slightly over one victim (1.06).

Homicide motive was coded into four dummy variables: drug/gang, interpersonal dispute, robbery, and other motive. A *domestic* homicide category, which included incidents that resulted from child abuse by parents or family members, spousal abuse, disputes between intimates or ex-intimates over their relationship and/or breakups, revenge over infidelities and sexual jealousy, and disputes between family members over family matters, served as the omitted reference category. *Drug and gang* homicides were defined as incidents that occurred because of sales or distribution of narcotics and/or other illegal drugs or homicides that occurred in order to further the

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of control variables (N = 505)

Variables	% or mean
Offender variables	
Race	
Black*	86.3%
Hispanic	11.7%
White	1.6%
Other	0.4%
Male	95.0%
Mean age	25.9
Mean deviant lifestyle	1.7
Victim variables	
Race	
Black*	82.0%
Hispanic	14.7%
White	3.0%
Other	0.4%
Male	85.0%
Mean age	29.7
Mean deviant lifestyle	1.3
Incident variables	
Gun	64.0%
Mean # victims killed	1.06
Motive	
Domestic*	16.0%
Drug/gang	24.0%
Interpersonal dispute	33.0%
Robbery	12.0%
Other	15.0%
After 9/11	60.0%

*Reference category.

interests of a gang (e.g., dispute over turf, colors, a gang initiation, internal conflict within a gang for power, or rivalry between two or more different gangs). *Interpersonal dispute* incidents involved non-domestic and non-drug murders that resulted from an argument, physical altercation, or the victim/offender wanting to get even for a past altercation. *Robbery* homicides referred to non-drug incidents that resulted from the offender's attempt to take by force money or other material goods from the victim. A fifth category consisted of any remaining homicides types not fitting the aforementioned categories. Of the 505 homicide incidents, 16 percent were domestic, 24 percent were drug or gang, 33 percent were interpersonal dispute, 12 percent were robbery, and 15 percent were caused by other factors (e.g., vehicular homicides, murder for hire, mental illnesses).

Finally, whether or not a homicide incident occurred prior to or following 2001 was also considered. News space is limited thus there is reason to expect that as news media coverage of terrorism-related news stories increased following the September 11 terrorism attacks, news media coverage of homicide changed. Therefore, it may be important to control for this change to eliminate one potential alternative explanation for bias in news media coverage of homicide incidents. A binary-coded variable measuring the years prior to 2001 (1997-2000) and following 2001 (2001-2005) was included. Nearly 60 percent of all homicides occurred between 2001 and 2005.

Findings

The findings are presented in three sections. Like Lundman (2003), this study first considered how each of the homicide incident control variables affected news selection bias, controlling for all other homicide characteristics. Control variables, or variables other than offender-victim race/ethnic and gender combinations, were considered separately. This analysis was similar to past research and allowed for the comparison of the effects of homicide incident and participant characteristics on selection bias in Newark with homicide characteristics in other cities examined in prior research. Second, this study presented the results from the multivariate analysis examining how offender-victim race/ethnic and gender combinations were related to news selection bias. This study examined what variables were significantly related with whether the incident was covered by the *The Star-Ledger* or not, and the amount of coverage a homicide incident received.

Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (1 = covered, 0 = not covered), logistic regression was the analytic tool utilized. The advantage of using this analytic technique is that it tests the goodness-of-fit of the entire model and provides odds ratio calculations in order to determine the relative importance of each independent variable (Pampel, 2000). Negative binomial regression was used to examine the effects of the homicide variables on the continuous dependent variable, number of specific articles. Negative binomial regression was employed because it is the appropriate statistical technique to use when the distribution of the dependent variable is both positively skewed and overdispersed (Long, 1997, p. 230).

Analyses of control variables

Table 3 presents the results involving all homicide control variables. The analysis in Table 3 includes slightly more homicides cases than the subsequent analysis focusing on offender-victim race/ethnic and gender combinations, as cases did not have to be dropped due to small combination variable cell sizes. Two offender variables, offender race and gender, were significantly related to the news media selection bias measures. First, homicides involving Hispanic homicide offenders were significantly more likely to be covered by the news media compared to homicides involving Black homicide offenders. Interestingly, although homicide occurrences involving Hispanic

Table 3
Logistic and negative binomial regression analyses of control variables (N = 501)[a]

	Covered or not? B (SE)	# of specific articles B (SE)
Offender variables		
White	-.361 (1.020)	-.873 (.790)
Hispanic	.849 (.400)**	.006 (.326)
Male	-.036 (.458)	.100 (.439)**
Age	-.011 (.012)	.012 (.010)
Deviant lifestyle	.057 (.128)	-.172 (.108)
Victim variables		
White	.923 (.825)	1.102 (.537)**
Hispanic	-.219 (.354)	-.134 (.299)
Male	-.041 (.306)	.274 (.263)
Age	-.002 (.009)	-.021 (.007)***
Deviant lifestyle	-.114 (.128)	-.432 (.116)****
Incident variables		
Gun	.547 (.259)**	-.070 (.228)
# victims killed	1.933 (.756)***	1.047 (.292)****
Motive		
Drug/gang	-.038 (.397)	-.656 (.351)*
Interpersonal dispute	-.032 (.337)	-.736 (.291)***
Robbery	-.086 (.441)	-.260 (.378)
Other	-.163 (.375)	-.907 (.316)***
After 9/11	-.028 (.199)	-.352 (.180)**
Constant	-1.385 (.997)	.160 (.667)
Pseudo R-square	.056	.081
Log-likelihood		-651.025
Chi-square	28.962**	114.440****

[a] Victims and offenders of "other" races (i.e., not Black, White, or Hispanic) were excluded from these analyses due to lack of sufficient cases.
* p ≤ .1.
** p ≤ .05.
*** p ≤ .01.
**** p ≤ .001.

offenders were more likely to be covered, they did not receive significantly more newspaper coverage (number of articles) suggesting that homicides that were covered might generally receive the same amount of attention unless they were considered more important than others because of the existence of other newsworthy characteristics. For example, the findings suggested that although gender was not an important covariate of whether a homicide was covered or not in the news, when homicides were covered, incidents with male perpetrators received more coverage than those involving females. Thus, supporting Lundman's (2003) findings that homicide occurrences involving non-stereotypical offenders and victims, despite being statistically rare, received significantly less media attention when other important homicide characteristics were held constant.

Three victim variables were significantly related to news media selection bias. In particular, victim age was inversely related to the amount of coverage a homicide incident received. As the age of the victim increased, the amount of coverage the incident received decreased. Also shown in Table 3, White victim, was significantly related to number of specific words written about Newark homicides. Thus, supporting the findings of past research on newsworthiness of homicide in other cities, homicides involving White victims received significantly more news attention compared to homicides involving African American victims. Victim prior deviant behavior was also significantly related to the number of articles written about a homicide incident even though it was not related to whether the incident was covered or not. That is, homicides involving victims who had been previously involved in deviant behavior received significantly less coverage when covered by the news media. This finding suggested that homicides involving "worthy victims," or victims deemed as undeserving of their fate, received increased news media coverage.

The effects of four incident control variables on news media selection bias are also shown in Table 3. Incident weapon was significantly related to news media selection. Incidents carried out with a gun were more likely to receive coverage by the media than those involving other weapons such as knives and blunt objects. This finding did not coincide with the hypothesis that statistically rare homicides are more likely to receive media attention, and conflicts with past research (see Buckler & Travis, 2005). Consistent with past research, however, homicides involving multiple victims were significantly more likely to receive news media coverage and to be displayed prominently. Incident motive was also significantly related to news media selection. When compared to the reference category (domestic disputes), drug/gang, interpersonal dispute, and other types of homicides received significantly less newspaper articles. Finally, the control for whether the homicide incident occurred after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 was inversely related to the amount of news coverage homicide incidents received. That is, homicide incidents in Newark received less media coverage (in terms of articles) after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Race/ethnicity and gender typification

Tables 4 and 5 show the findings of the offender-victim race/ethnic and gender combinations. Issues with multicollinearity required that several changes be made to obtain valid estimates of the regression coefficients in these models. For example, it was impossible to include victim and offender race, offender race, and offender-victim race combinations as they formed a linear combination. As a result, victim and offender race were dropped from the models presented in Table 4. In addition, victim and offender race and gender were removed from

Table 4
Logistic and negative binomial regression analyses of disaggregated offender-victim race/ethnicity (N = 484)[a]

	Covered or not?	# of specific articles
	B (SE)	B (SE)
Offender-victim race/ethnicity combinations		
Black-on-Hispanic	-.058 (.409)	-.166 (.554)
Hispanic-on-Black	1.999 (.662)*	-.100 (.497)
Hispanic-on-Hispanic	.651 (.383)*	-.139 (.314)
Offender variables		
Male	.063 (.470)	1.025 (.456)**
Age	-.009 (.013)	-.011 (.010)
Deviant lifestyle	.059 (.131)	-.193 (.112)*
Victim variables		
Male	-.073 (.313)	.359 (.273)
Age	-.004 (.009)	-.021 (.007)***
Deviant lifestyle	-.045 (.131)	-.400 (.118)****
Incident variables		
Gun	.571 (.265)**	.008 (.233)
# victims killed	1.815 (.746)**	1.028 (.287)****
Motive		
Drug/gang	-.226 (.407)	-.754 (.357)**
Interpersonal dispute	-.164 (.344)	-.813 (.295)***
Robbery	-.206 (.457)	-.333 (.387)
Other	-.297 (.386)	-1.038 (.328)***
After 9/11	-.024 (.202)	-.345 (.183)*
Constant	-1.334 (1.00)	.073 (.680)
Pseudo R-square	.057	.080
Log-likelihood		-620.208
Chi-square	28.389**	108.060****

[a] Only offender-victim race and race-gender combination variables with a cell size of ten or more were included in analyses.
*p ≤ .1.
** p ≤ .05.
*** p ≤ .01.
**** p ≤ .001.

Table 5
Logistic and negative binomial regression analyses of offender-victim disaggregated race/ethnicity and gender combinations (N = 464)[a]

	Covered or not?	# of specific articles
	B (SE)	B (SE)
Offender-victim race/ethnicity and gender combinations		
Black male-on-Black female	.271 (.368)	-.661 (.320)**
Black male-on-Hispanic male	.112 (.453)	-.262 (.385)
Black female-on-Black male	.181 (.565)	-1.481 (.573)***
Hispanic male-on-Black male	1.177 (.670)*	-.118 (.521)
Hispanic male-on-Hispanic male	.773 (.445)*	-.326 (.367)
Offender variables		
Age	-.006 (.013)	-.009 (.010)
Deviant lifestyle	.084 (.133)	.144 (.114)
Victim variables		
Age	-.001 (.009)	-.020 (.007)***
Deviant lifestyle	-.041 (.133)	-.378 (.120)***
Incident variables		
Gun	.604 (.274)**	-.154 (.248)
# victims killed	2.458 (1.033)**	.985 (.366)***
Motive		
Drug/gang	-.133 (.432)	-.781 (.386)**
Interpersonal dispute	-.066 (.373)	-.868 (.327)***
Robbery	-.056 (.483)	-.337 (.491)
Other	-.205 (.417)	-1.123 (.366)***
After 9/11	.003 (.207)	-.335 (.187)*
Constant	-2.363 (1.179)*	1.510 (.529)***
Pseudo R-square	.059	0.081
Log-likelihood		-584.603
Chi-square	28.152**	101.850****

[a] Only offender-victim race and race-gender combination variables with a cell size of ten or more were included in analyses.
* p ≤ .1.
** p ≤ .05.
*** p ≤ .01.
**** p ≤ .001.

the models presented in Table 5 due to collinearity issues with the victim and offender race and gender combinations.

Table 4 suggests that not all statistically deviant homicide occurrences received significantly more news media attention. Column 1 presents the results on what variables increased the likelihood that a homicide was covered. Hispanic offender/Black victim and Hispanic offender/Hispanic victim homicides were significantly more likely to be covered than Black offender/Black victim homicides. Homicides involving guns and multiple victims were also significantly more likely to be covered. Column 2 presents the results for the number of articles dependent variable. None of the race combinations increased the number of articles written about a homicide, but several of the control variables were significant.[9] More articles were written about homicides involving males. Consistent with Pritchard's (1985) notion of social status, if one considers the deviance scale as a good proxy for status, significantly fewer articles were written about deviant victims and offenders. As a victim's age increased, the number of articles written about the homicide decreased. More articles were also written about multiple victim homicides. Drug/gang, interpersonal, and other types of homicides had significantly fewer articles written about them compared to domestic homicides. It was interesting that significantly fewer articles were written after 9/11 compared to before, but this variable did not impact whether the homicide was covered. Although homicide remained an important news topic after 9/11, these results suggested that there was just less space to cover them.[10]

The analyses of the disaggregated race/ethnicity gender combinations revealed somewhat similar results. Homicides involving Hispanic males as offenders were more likely to receive media coverage than those involving Black male or female offenders (Table 5),

although the Hispanic offender combinations did not significantly influence the number of articles written about the homicide. In short, all of the analyses examining whether a homicide was covered suggested that the racial typification that is important in the city of Newark is that of Hispanics. Additionally, Black male/Black female and Black female/Black female homicides, although occurring less frequently than Black male/Black male homicides, received significantly fewer articles.[11]

Finally, it is important to note that Table 5 also shows very similar results to those reported earlier in terms of the significance and strength of the control variables. Similar to Table 3, incidents carried out with a gun, and those that involved multiple homicide victims were more likely to be covered in *The Star-Ledger*. In terms of the amount of coverage, older victim, deviant victims, and incidents occurring after 9/11 decreased the number of articles written about a homicide incident. In addition, drug/gang, interpersonal, and other motive homicides received fewer articles compared to domestic homicides. Finally, increases in the number of victims killed also increased the number of articles written about an incident.

Discussion

A primary goal of news organizations is to produce news efficiently (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1991; Sherizen, 1978). One potential consequence of this streamlined decision-making process is that reporters rely on shortcuts and snap judgments to produce several stories every day. It is reasonable to suspect that such shortcuts result in stereotypical patterns of decision-making, although possibly unconsciously, about "typical" homicide victims and offenders when deciding which homicide occurrences to cover, emphasize, and ignore. Indeed, scholars studying news coverage of crime have argued that news media may rely on "unconscious" stereotypes of crime participants based on race/ethnic and gender statuses that tend to permeate society to make news selection and framing decisions (e.g., Entman, 1992; Meyers, 1997).

This study was an attempt to understand how race/ethnicity and gender interact with incident characteristics to affect news media selection and prominence decision-making. This study built on previous research in several ways. First, news workers' selection and prominence decisions were examined in Newark, a city in which homicide is not a rare event, and the majority of the population is Black. This approach is important because previous studies had not examined news media decision-making in cities that fit these characteristics. Second, this study examined Hispanics as an independent ethnic group instead of aggregating them with Blacks or Whites like previous studies. Third, this study tested for the interaction effects of ethnic and gender intersections on news media decision-making. Finally, a number of control variables were considered that had never been examined before such as the prior deviant behavior of victims and offenders, motive, weapon, and current events.

The findings of this study provided partial support for the assertion that "cultural typification" of homicide participants is an important dimension of newsworthiness, and that relative frequency is only a partial explanation for news selection bias (see also Lundman, 2003; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). It is clear that the decision to cover, and how much to cover, a homicide incident is guided by many factors, which include racial/gender typification, the characteristics of incidents, and current events.

In terms of race/ethnic and gender typification, there were several important findings to highlight. First, Hispanic on Hispanic and Hispanic on Black homicide occurrences were more likely to be selected for news coverage, controlling for several other control variables. In contrast, other types of uncommon homicide occurrences involving other uncommon offender-victim race/ethnic combinations (e.g., Black on Hispanic) received only average news media attention. Overall, this finding suggested that that even though Hispanic

offenders are considered newsworthy, Hispanic victims are not. This lends further support to Lundman's (2003) and Pritchard and Hughes' (1997) research findings, which showed that race-based stereotypes of homicide participants were an important dimension of newsworthiness. Unlike Lundman (2003) and Pritchard and Hughes (1997), however, the racial stereotypes being perpetuated are those that target Hispanics and not Blacks.

One possible explanation for this relates to the "social threat hypothesis" (Blalock, 1967; Liska, 1992; see also Chiricos, McEntire, & Gertz, 2001). Hispanic homicide offenders may be newsworthy possibly because Hispanics are seen as a social threat relative to Blacks and Whites. Studies have suggested that the media tend to link social issues of recent immigration and current Hispanic populations with increased crime (Mann & Zatz, 1998; Martinez & Lee, 1998; Martinez, Lee, & Nielsen, 2001). In addition, Hispanics are also perceived by some as a threat to "American" culture and way of life (Press, 2006). The explanation for this might be twofold. First, Hispanics represent the largest minority group in the country, and due to their increasing numbers, the dominant racial/ethnic groups might be threatened. Second, unlike many other ethnic groups, on average, Hispanics do not completely assimilate into the American way of life. Hispanics tend to be very proud of their cultural heritage and struggle to retain it while living in the U.S. For example, many maintain their language and celebrate their heritage with parades (e.g., the Puerto Rican Day Parade). These actions in turn may seem like a threat to the way of life of dominant ethnic groups who might interpret the cultural pride of Hispanics as not wanting to live the American way of life. In addition, some might even fear that Hispanic culture will permeate and erode the core values of American culture.

Second, some offender race/gender intersections significantly decreased the newsworthiness of homicides. For example, incidents involving Black females as victims or assailants received less media coverage than the more common Black male on Black male incidents. This finding partially supported Lundman (2003), since Black female offenders went against the stereotypes of homicide participants especially when they killed Black males, the least newsworthy victims and the group that often received the homicide "assailant" stereotype. Without considering the intersections of race and gender of offender-victim combinations, nuanced findings such as these would go unnoticed. Therefore, this finding highlights the importance of considering social statuses both independently and as intersecting and interdependently-related variables.

Third, there was partial support for the hypothesis that uncommon homicides that challenge stereotypical images of homicide participants should receive significantly less news media coverage. Specifically, this study found that victims who were involved in illegal and/or deviant activities prior to their murder were less likely to receive coverage than those that were not. In other words, these victims were considered less "newsworthy." This finding supported the idea that homicides challenging the stereotypical image of homicide participants are less likely to be covered since victims are not often perceived by the public as being involved in lifestyles that would increase their risk of victimization.

Several of the other control variables consistently influenced media salience, especially in terms of the number of articles written about an incident. Specifically, age and homicides occurring after 9/11 decreased the likelihood of coverage. Homicide motive, number of victims, and weapon used to carry out the incident also affected whether the incident was covered, and the amount of coverage it received. Specifically, domestic homicides and incidents that involved more than one victim were more likely to receive more media coverage than other homicide motives. One possible explanation for this was that incidents that fit these characteristics were relatively rare in the city of Newark when compared to overall homicides. Another reason was that these types of incidents may be considered more heinous and "culturally deviant" than other homicide types

because more than one person was killed, and because the assailant and victim had a familial/ intimate relationship. Finally, contrary to the argument that rare incidents are more likely to receive media attention, incidents carried out with a gun, which were the most common, were more likely to receive media attention that those carried out with other weapons. This finding was not expected, but it can be a product of these incidents conforming to the public's perception of how homicide incidents are committed.

Conclusion

There are a number of potential implications for emphasizing and de-emphasizing some homicide occurrences in the news based on the race/ethnic and gender statuses of victims and offenders. The public relies on the news media for its information about crime and the response to crime by criminal justice agencies (Surette, 1998; Yanich, 2005), thus distorted representations of homicide participants could result in an inaccurate public definition of homicide as a social problem. Furthermore, emphasizing homicide occurrences in the press that align with racist and sexist stereotypes will continue to reproduce stereotypical race and gender-based images and socially constructed categories of homicide participants. In effect, distorted images of homicide participants could affect fear of crime as well as the public understanding of the origins or causes of violent crime.

One of the contributions of this study was that it examined how race and gender relations between victims and offenders affect news media coverage in Newark, a city very different socially and demographically from other cities studied in prior research. These social and demographic differences, however, also impeded the researchers from making direct comparisons with prior research taking place in cities in which Whites were the majority of the population. Therefore, it was possible that the findings of this study were driven by demographic composition of the research site; however, it was impossible to be certain given the lack of studies that had employed similar methodologies. Consequently, it is important for future research to continue to study selection bias in homicide news coverage in various geographic regions, similar and dissimilar to Newark, in order to better generalize findings across studies, and to uncover whether "newsworthy" is better explained by place.

This was the first study to examine how offender-victim race/ethnic combinations between Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics affect news selection bias. This study found that homicide occurrences involving Hispanic offenders and White, Black, and Hispanic victims were considered significantly more newsworthy than the most common Black-on-Black homicide. Unfortunately, the number of White homicide participants in the sample of homicides was very small, making comparisons between Whites and other races difficult and possibly causing the weak statistical effects of some offender-victim status combinations on news media selection bias. Moreover, while the current study extended past research by considering offender-victim race/ethnic and gender combination involving Hispanics, the inability of this study to consider offender-victim race combinations between Blacks and Whites limited its generalizability to prior studies. These findings, however, may be more generalizable to municipalities that are similar to Newark in terms of social structural characteristics, racial composition and crime rates (e.g., Oakland and Compton, California, as well as Camden and Trenton, New Jersey, in which the majority of residents are Black, followed by Hispanic, and then by Whites). Thus, more research on the newsworthiness of homicides across cities with diverse racial/ethnic populations is needed in order to determine the generalizability of these findings. In sum, future research needs to continue to examine race/ethnic and gender combinations in order for one to better understand how cultural typifications based on race and gender affect news media evaluations of newsworthiness. Importantly, very little literature has examined issues related to the presentation of Hispanics in crime stories. Future research should consider not only whether

Hispanics influence the coverage and prominence of a crime story, but also document what is emphasized in these stories, compared to White and Blacks, and how these images have changed over time.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Portions of the information provided in this section also appear in a book chapter that addresses broader issues of race, crime, and media (Chermak, Gruenewald, & Pizarro, 2009).

2. Lundman (2003) and Lundman et al. (2004) noted that the Homicide Unit of the Columbus Police Department did not distinguish Hispanics from African American or White violators, and thus had to exclude Hispanics from the analysis (Lundman, 2003, p. 370).

3. In addition to the Star-Ledger, there were numerous smaller newspapers that target specific populations in the city such as Hispanics. These newspapers, however, were published in Spanish, and did not have wide readership. Thus, making The Star-Ledger the official local newspaper of Newark.

4. There were twenty-seven double homicides, one triple, and one quadruple, which resulted in 696 homicide victims.

5. Of the 505 homicides, police identified more than one offender in 128 (25 percent) of the cases. In cases where more than one offender was identified, only information on the "primary offender" was used. That is, the person identified by police as the most responsible (e.g., the trigger person) for the death of the victim. In the cases where the role of the offender was inconclusive, the individual first identified by police and charged with the homicide was coded as the primary offender.

6. For those homicides that were reported by The Star-Ledger, the prominence of the news story was also measured by noting whether or not the story appeared on the front page (1 = front page, 0 = not front page). Between 1997 and 2005, however, only 2.3 percent of all homicides that were covered by The Star-Ledger during this time received front-page coverage. Therefore, front-page coverage as an indicator of news media selection bias was not used.

7. The combinations of offender-age age and gender were initially considered. For age, all victims and offenders were categorized into three age groupings: zero to fifteen, sixteen to twenty-five, and twenty-six and older, which resulted in nine dummy-coded age variables. For offender-victim gender, four dummy-coded variables were created: male-on-male, male-on-female, female-on-male, and female-on-female. There were no significant differences between offender-victim age and gender combinations. This finding was inconsistent with the findings of Lundman (2003, p. 376) who found that female-on-male homicide occurrences were significantly less likely to receive news media attention and received significantly less coverage when selected.

8. Originally a number of other control variables in the regression analyses were considered, but eventually were not included due to problems with covariance and irrelevance to the regression models. Those control variables not included in the regression analyses were number of offenders, mode (e.g., face-to-face, drive-by, etc.), offender-victim relationship, day of week, location, neighborhood poverty, and neighborhood social disorganization.

9. Additional analyses using the number of words as the dependent variable were run. Similar to the results presented in Table 4, none of the race-gender combinations significantly influenced the number of words written about a homicide. Results from these analyses are available upon request.

10. Eight dummy variables for each year of homicide data were initially included, using 1997 as the omitted reference category. The impact of year of homicide incident on selection bias (covered or not) was not entirely clear as Newark homicides occurring in 1999 and 2003 were significantly more likely to be selected for news coverage than the reference category, but homicides occurring in 2001 were significantly less likely to receive coverage. It was clear, however, that homicides occurring in 2000 and after received significantly less amounts of news coverage (number of articles) compared to 1997 homicides. One possible explanation is that homicides may have received less coverage after 2001 due to the increased coverage of terrorism-related stories following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in nearby New York and in Washington, D.C. Therefore, a dummy variable measuring year of homicide before and after 2001 was included instead of including dummy variables for each year.

11. Additional analyses using the number of words as the dependent variable were run. The direction of the relationships was the same as presented in Table 5, but none of the combinations were statistically significant. Results from these analyses are available upon request.

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