

Printed in Black and White: The *New York Times*' Construction of Black Men and White Police Officers during Escalated Encounters

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# Background

- Research Questions:
  - How has the media constructed race within the identities of black men and white police officers during escalated encounters?
  - How has the discourse changed over time?
- Thesis:
  - While the media have begun to offer a more inclusive understanding of all views in news events, news articles still reinforce the hegemonic perspective of the audience.

# Theory

- Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding (1980)

# Literature Review

- Media and the Reality of Crime
  - Sacco (1995); Jerin and Fields (1994)
- Media and Type of Crime
  - Sheley and Ashkins (1981); Pollak and Kubrin (2007)
- Media Coverage of Race and Crime
  - Buckler and Travis (2005); Bjornstrom et al. (2010); Dixon and Linz (2000); Dixon, Azocar, and Casas (2003); Chiricos and Eschholz (2002); Dixon (2015); Entman (1992; 1994); Romer et al. (1998)
- Media Construction of Race and Roles within Crime
  - Sorenson et al. (1998); Bjornstrom et al. (2010)

# Methodology

- Rodney King (1991), Amadou Diallo (1999), and Michael Brown (2014)
- *New York Times* news articles
- Sample of 40 articles for each encounter
  - N=120 articles
- Quantitative and Qualitative content analysis

# Findings

- Change in focus from solely the police officer(s) to equal dedication to the black male and police officers
- Tonal shift from criticizing police action to supporting the black male
- Black male as non-threatening; police officer's conduct not addressed
- Black men as passive receiver of white police officer(s)'s actions, which becomes more pronounced over time

# Person of Focus

Table 3  
Main Person of Focus in NYT Articles by Escalated Encounter

Encounter	Person of Focus				
	Police Officer(s)	Equal dedication	Black Male	Other	TOTAL
Rodney King	27	7	4	2	40 (33.3%)
Amadou Diallo	25	3	11	1	40 (33.3%)
Michael Brown	5	24	8	3	40 (33.3%)
TOTAL	57 (47.5%)	34 (28.3%)	23 (19.2%)	6 (5%)	120 (100%)

# Primary Perceived Tone

Table 4  
Primary Perceived Tone of NYT Articles for each Escalated Encounter

Encounter	Primary Perceived Tone					TOTAL
	Anti-Police	Neutral	Pro-Citizen	Pro-Police	Anti-Citizen	
Rodney King	15	11	5	9	0	40 (33.3%)
Amadou Diallo	17	11	6	5	1	40 (33.3%)
Michael Brown	12	9	15	4	0	40 (33.3%)
TOTAL	44 (36.7%)	31 (25.8%)	26 (21.7%)	18 (15%)	1 (0.8%)	120 (100%)



# Discourse of Black Male and Police Conduct

Table 5  
NYT Articles' Discourse of the Black Male during Escalated Encounters

Encounter	Discourse			
	"unarmed"/ "unresisting"	Not mentioned	"aggressive"/ "threatening"	TOTAL
Rodney King	5	32	3	40 (29.6%)
Amadou Diallo	25	14	8	47* (34.8%)
Michael Brown	33	7	8	48** (35.6%)
TOTAL	63 (46.7%)	53 (39.3%)	19 (14.1%)	135 (100%)

\*7 articles are double-counted as both "unarmed" and "threatening"  
\*\*8 articles are double-counted as both "unarmed" and "threatening"

Table 6  
Discourse of Police Conduct within NYT Articles of Escalated Encounters

Encounter	Discourse of Police Conduct			
	Not Addressed	Police Brutality/ "Excessive Force"	Justified Force	TOTAL
Rodney King	21	17	2	40 (31.5%)
Amadou Diallo	19	20	8	47* (37%)
Michael Brown	28	3	9	40 (31.5%)
TOTAL	68 (53.5%)	40 (31.5%)	19 (15%)	127 (100%)

\*7 articles are double-counted because they included discourse of both police brutality and justified force

# Primary Verb Usage for Black Male and White Police Officer(s)

Table 7  
Primary Verb Usage for Black Male in NYT Articles of Escalated Encounters

Encounter	Verb Usage			
	Passive	Active	Equal	TOTAL
Rodney King	36	2	2	40 (33.3%)
Amadou Diallo	39	0	1	40 (33.3%)
Michael Brown	31	7	2	40 (33.3%)
TOTAL	106 (88.3%)	9 (7.5%)	5 (4.2%)	120 (100%)

Table 8  
Primary Verb Usage for White Police Officer(s) in NYT Articles of Escalated Encounters

Encounter	Verb Usage			
	Active	Passive	Equal	TOTAL
Rodney King	23	16	1	40 (33.3%)
Amadou Diallo	25	13	2	40 (33.3%)
Michael Brown	27	9	4	40 (33.3%)
TOTAL	75 (62.5%)	38 (31.7%)	7 (5.8%)	120 (100%)

# Discussion

- The relationship between NYT publishers and their primary audience of readers
- Liberal readers influence the NYT's construction of images and events
- The relationship between news media and their audience reinforce Hall's (1980) theory of Encoding/Decoding